

813  
M199h

[No. 29.]

Price 25 Cents.

the Post Office at New York at Second Class Rates.—Feb. 28, 1891.

Copyrighted by George Munro, 1891.—By Subscription, \$3.00 per Annum.

*The Library of*  
*American Authors.*

---

\* \* \*

His Country Cousin

BY CHARLOTTE M. STANLEY,

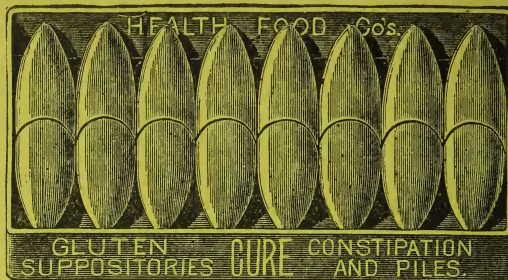
AUTHOR OF "HER SECOND CHOICE," ETC., ETC.

\* \* \*

GEORGE MUNRO, PUBLISHER,  
17 TO 27 VANDEWATER STREET, NEW YORK.

# ABANDON PHYSIC!

All our Health Food  
Circulars Free.



50 Cents by Mail.  
Sold by Druggists.

## INTESTINAL TORPOR AND KINDRED EVILS

**RELIEVED WITHOUT DRUGS.**

The sufferer from Constipation and Piles should test the **GLUTEN SUPPOSITORIES** which cure most cases by INCREASING THE NUTRITION OF THE PARTS, thus inducing desire and strengthening the power of expulsion.

### READ THE EVIDENCE.

DR. A. W. THOMPSON, Northampton, Mass., says: "I have tested the Gluten Suppositories, and consider them valuable, as, indeed, I expected from the excellence of their theory."

DR. WM. TOD HELMUTH declares the Gluten Suppositories to be "the best remedy for constipation which I have ever prescribed."

"As Sancho Panza said of sleep, so say I of your Gluten Suppositories: God bless the man who invented them!"—E. L. RIPLEY, Burlington, Vt.

"I have been a constipated dyspeptic for many years, and the effect has been to reduce me in flesh, and to render me liable to no little nerve prostration and sleeplessness, especially after preaching or any special mental effort. The use of Gluten Suppositories, made by the Health Food Co., 61 Fifth Avenue, New York, has relieved the constipated habit, and their Gluten and Brain Food have secured for me new powers of digestion, and the ability to sleep soundly and think clearly. I believe their food-remedies to be worthy of the high praise which they are receiving on all sides."—REV. JOHN H. PATON, Mich.

"I cannot speak too highly of the Health Food Company's Gluten Suppositories, as they have been a perfect God-send to me. I believe them superior to anything ever devised for the relief of constipation and hemorrhoids. I have suffered from these evils more than twenty years, and have at last found substantial relief through the use of the Gluten Suppositories."—CYRUS BRADBURY, Hopedale, Mass.

"I prescribe the Gluten Suppositories almost daily in my practice, and am often astonished at the permanent results obtained."—J. MONTFORT SCHLEY, M. D., Professor Physical Diagnosis Woman's Medical College, New York City.

"I have been using them with excellent results."—F. H. WILLIAMS, M. D. Trenton, N. J.

"Have used a half dozen, and never had anything give me so much satisfaction."—A. P. CHARLTON, M. D., Jenneville, Pa.

"I have used your Gluten Suppositories in my family with great satisfaction."—S. B. COWLES, President Pacific Bank, Clarks, Nebraska.

"I have had some very satisfactory experience in the treatment of constipation with your Wheat Gluten Suppositories."—CHARLES W. BENEDICT, Findlay, Ohio.

### HEALTH FOOD COMPANY,

61 Fifth Avenue, cor. Thirteenth St., New York City; 199 Tremont St., Boston, Mass.

# PILLS

THE GREAT  
ENGLISH  
REMEDY



CHEAP  
PAINLESS  
EFFECTUAL

**“Worth a Guinea a Box,”**  
But sold by all Druggists at 25 cents.

*A Wonderful Medicine*

FOR ALL

**Bilious and Nervous Disorders**

SUCH AS

**Sick Headache,  
Constipation,  
Weak Stomach,  
Impaired Digestion,  
Disordered Liver, Etc.**

PREPARED ONLY BY THOS. BEECHAM, ST. HELENS, LANCASHIRE, ENG.  
B. F. ALLEN CO., SOLE AGENTS FOR UNITED STATES, 365 & 367  
CANAL ST. NEW YORK, who (if your druggist does not keep them) will mail  
Beecham's Pills on receipt of price, 25c.—but inquire first. Correspond-  
ents will please mention the name of the publication in which this  
advertisement is seen.

# Alice's Adventures

By **LEWIS CARROLL.**

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS."

With Forty-two Beautiful Illustrations by John Tenniel.

HANDSOMELY BOUND IN CLOTH. 12MO. PRICE 50 CENTS.

---

## Through the Looking-Glass & What Alice Found There

By **LEWIS CARROLL.**

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN TENNIEL.

ELEGANTLY BOUND IN CLOTH. PRICE 50 CENTS.

---

## NEW TABERNACLE SERMONS.

BY THE

Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage, D.D.

HANDSOMELY BOUND IN CLOTH. 12MO. PRICE \$1.00.

---

## Blood is Thicker than Water:

A FEW DAYS AMONG

OUR SOUTHERN BRETHREN.

By **Henry M. Field, D.D.**

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## Juliet Corson's New Family Cook Book.

By **MISS JULIET CORSON.**

Handsomely Bound in Cloth. Price \$1.00.

---

The above works are for sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent by mail on receipt of the price. Address

GEORGE MUNRO, Munro's Publishing House,  
(P. O. Box 3751.) 17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.



# HIS COUNTRY COUSIN;

OR,

MERCY CRAVEN'S LOVERS.

A STORY OF HEARTS AND HOMES.

BY

CHARLOTTE M. STANLEY.



NEW YORK:  
GEORGE MUNRO, PUBLISHER,  
17 TO 27 VANDEWATER STREET.

*Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1885, by*  
GEORGE MUNRO,  
*in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

813

M199h

30 April 30 7 pages  

## HIS COUNTRY COUSIN.

---

### CHAPTER I.

#### INTRODUCTORY.

“AND so you’re going to have Mercy Craven to come and live with you? Well, to be sure! When Steve told me so last night, I never was more astonished! ‘What for?’ I asked Steve. ‘What under the sun does a young wife like Polly, with only two little ones, and plenty of servants to help her, want with a girl like Mercy Craven, who’ll be as much the mistress as herself?’ But Steve could tell me nothing; his mind is too full of pretty Ada, there”—with a glance at the further end of the handsome room, where her youngest son stood leaning over a lovely girl, who was seated at a piano—not playing it, but drawing her fingers idly over the keys—“Steve sees and hears little else than Ada, when Ada is anywhere near. So I made up my mind to come and have a talk with you about it. *I* know more about the Cravens than *you* do, my dear; and, if the thing isn’t settled and done, take a little time to consider and think before you do what we may all be sorry for.”

The speaker was Mrs. Raymond—“Pretty Widow Raymond” folks had called her something over twenty years ago, which was a few months before the daughter whom she now addressed, and the son, who was busy playing at love beside the piano yonder, made their joint appearance in what seemed to their young mother a weary, weary world; for she had had two fine, bouncing boys already, of

701490

the respective ages of five and seven, and therefore, when these twins arrived within some seven months of the husband and father's sudden death, it really did seem to the poor little sorrowful woman that the measure of her affliction was both piled up very high, and pressed down very, very hard indeed. They were two such bewildering little circumstances, and it was so hard for any one to quite decide how they were to be properly provided for; for Tom Raymond, senior, while making sufficient, and even handsome, provision for his wife and two sons, had neither known nor thought of, nor in any way prepared for any further responsibilities; so that, when these posthumous babies came upon the scene, they found their two elder brothers in full and firm possession of whatever the father had had to leave, and themselves not only fatherless but penniless—not that there was any absolute danger of their ever coming to want—their mother was too well provided for, and too loving and dutiful to them to permit that, unless—unless—(Widow Raymond was only twenty-five, and very pretty) unless she should see fit to marry a second time, in which case the poor little twins, in addition to being penniless, would pass from the secure and natural condition of safe dependence on a mother's love to the somewhat dubious, and often painful, state of reliance on the cold kindness of a step-father.

This state of things came of the peculiar conditions of Mr. Raymond's will, made only a few months before his death, but whether with any prescience of that death—which was sudden and accidental—upon his mind, who shall tell? Probably, however, as he was a careful and cautious man, who had worked hard for his money, and was no longer young, no further motive than a right solicitude for the welfare of the dear ones dependent on him was needed to account for that wise action which the quickly following calamity of his death made appear so providential and well-timed; be that as it may, however,



the will was made, and the following were its principal conditions:

His business (he had owned a flourishing dry-goods store in a good neighborhood) was to be carried on by persons, and under the supervision of trustees, whom he himself appointed, in trust for his two sons, until they should come of age and be able to take charge of it themselves, when it was to become wholly theirs, either upon the terms of a joint partnership, or by such just and equitable division as they might mutually agree upon. Between these two boys he also equally divided all personal property and moneys belonging to him at the time of his death, with the exception of the sum of five thousand dollars, which he directed should be paid to his widow. Three thousand dollars per year was also to come to her out of the estate, so long as she remained a widow, for her own and her two children's maintenance until the latter were of age, after which the sum of two thousand dollars per annum was to be paid her for her own exclusive use, always upon that same condition of her continued widowhood, separate and liberal provision being made for the two children's education; but if, on the other hand, Mrs. Raymond should think proper to marry a second time, she, by such marriage, forfeited this provision, as well as the control and custody of her two sons, the testator explaining that, while he had no wish to unduly influence the actions of his widow, he did desire to secure the mother entirely to her sons; and, furthermore, had no intention of either dowering another man's wife, or permitting his children to pass into a second husband's custody. Pretty Mrs. Raymond, when she heard the will read, smiled faintly amid her tears, more pleased than vexed at "poor, dear Tom's foolish, jealous notions."

"As if I should ever think of such a thing as a second marriage!" she sighed. "Such a husband as my poor Tom was doesn't fall to a woman's lot twice in a life-time,

I fancy. No, no, he needn't have been afraid; I sha'n't replace him. The rest of my life will be devoted to the care of his little ones—not only for the two boys he was so fond and proud of, and has done so well for, but the poor babe that will never know a father's care, to whom I must be father and mother both, alas!" and at that pathetic thought her faint smile died, and tears fell fast and sorrowfully.

She was not very much concerned, at first, as to the future prospects of the expected infant. "Dear Tom" had been so generous to her that she could easily save enough money, by the time the child should be of age, to portion it almost as well as its two brothers; but when the longed-for and yet dreaded hour arrived, and a *pair* of helpless babies lay upon her widowed bosom, the great, maternal love aroused a thousand womanly anxieties, and she began to doubt and question, timidly, how should she ever provide for the two? The sum which she might save out of her allowance from the estate would seem a pitiful portion enough, compared to that of her elder boys, when it should come to be divided between two. Well, one thing at least was very certain now: poor Tom's wishes about her perpetual widowhood would be fulfilled. Every thought must be devoted to these two children—every nerve must be strained to fill their father's place to them, and make amends for the unintentional wrong done by the will, which was made before they came into existence.

The brave little woman kept her resolution well. There came a time, when the twins were seven years old, when she felt "poor dear Tom's" conditions hard and selfish, since they deprived her of the companionship of a congenial mind—the consolation of a husband's love and care, offered her then by one from whom she would have accepted them, had anything less sacred than the interests of her children been at stake; as it was, she did not hesitate for an instant.

“So long as my children need me, I belong to them,” she told her suitor. “If I married you I should come to you penniless and with two little ones; and if you are so generous, or think so much of me that you would undertake such a responsibility for my sake, neither you nor I, being made comparatively poor by such a marriage, could make amends to these children for what they would lose. I have saved and laid by five thousand dollars for them in these seven years—only five thousand dollars. I, who have hitherto belonged wholly to them and to their father’s memory. Should I be able to do even half so well for them as your wife? No. And I should feel that, for my present happiness, I had jeopardized their future. Therefore I say no. So long as my children need a mother’s service I can be no man’s wife.”

And these children were only seven years old. How many weary years of waiting must elapse before they would cease to need her! The man who loved her knew her to be jealous of the superior wealth of her elder sons, and ambitious to place these later children on something like an equal footing. How long would it take her to accomplish that, seeing that, in seven long years she had saved but five thousand dollars? She was a very woman who would take the slow, sure, tedious road to moderate means—not run bold risks for wealth; and he, on his part, had enough for all, but no surplus with which to buy these twins immunity from possible evils, or recompense them for probable loss. He had cared enough for her to take her and her children penniless and serve them as his own; but he did not care enough to do what was much harder—wait—wait through an indefinite time, with indefinite prospects for a barely possible good, which, after all, might never come to reward him, and through this weary, hopeless waiting, see another preferred—ay, though that other was only her own helpless child—preferred before himself. “Better have done with hope and love at

once," he thought, "and reconcile one's self to the inevitable;" and it is to be presumed that he took this sensible and truly masculine course as soon as might be, for within two years' time of his rejection by "Pretty Widow Raymond" he was married.

She turned a shade paler when she heard of it, and, in her own room that night I think she shed a few quiet tears; but the warm lovelight in her eyes, as she looked down upon her sleeping babes, soon dried the teardrops.

"I have done my duty to you, darlings," she whispered, and found sweet consolation in the thought. Moreover, the tender little woman had her share of gentle, womanly pride. "He could not have rightly loved me," she thought, "and put another woman in the place he offered me so very soon; it was not me he wanted, but just a wife. Ah, well, God make him happy with the one he has wedded. I shall not waste regrets on one who did not love me well enough to wait. I have my children still."

Ten years later she had parted with one of these idolized children—Mariana, familiarly called Polly, who had realized and fulfilled all her mother's most ambitious hopes for her by a really prosperous and desirable marriage. Polly became Mrs. Richard Lester, and Richard Lester was considered (matrimonially) quite a catch by all the ladies of his circle. As for saucy, merry, light-hearted Polly Raymond, only just sixteen years old, and scarcely released from her school-books yet, when she found that the big fish had floundered into her careless net, astonishment filled her mind so completely as to leave no room, for awhile, for any other sentiment whatever.

"The idea of Dick Lester"—she had known him from her birth, Mr. Lester, senior, being one of the executors of the famous will that had left her penniless—"the idea of Dick Lester wanting to marry *me*!" she would exclaim—"to *marry* me, you know"—with a change of emphasis which made it appear that she would have thought his



wanting to adopt her or beat her less extraordinary—"a giddy little thing like me!—and he twelve years my senior, and so grave! Little mother"—they always patronized their mother, these twins, to whom she had devoted her life, and she liked the patronage—"little mother, it is at once the most surprising and most ridiculous thing that I ever heard of!"

It flattered her girlish vanity, nevertheless; nor had the seeds of ambition which the mother had most naturally and innocently implanted in her young mind fallen upon barren ground. When Mrs. Raymond pointed out the advantages of the match, laughing Miss Polly grew grave enough and listened attentively; and in the end—an end only six months distant—she married Richard Lester, and had been his happy and fortunate wife for almost four years at the time my story opens.

Following her mother's example, but at the very outset of her matrimonial career, she had presented her husband with twins—with all reasonable expedition—and was engaged in dancing one of them to "Banbury Cross" upon her knee, while the other built up and knocked down brick pyramids—of wooden bricks—around her feet, the while the little mother, now a cosy, comfortable, handsome matron of forty-five, poured mingled mischief and wisdom into her willing ears, the result of which process, as well as some other particulars of considerable importance to my story, I shall reserve for another chapter.

---

## CHAPTER II.

### FOREBODING EVIL.

"THE thing *is* settled and done," sighed Mrs. Lester, a little discontentedly. "Aunt Craven came to town a few weeks ago and called on us, and I was civil to her, of course; but—well, you know, mother, I never liked her. Not a word about Mercy's coming does she say to me, but

goes down to Richard's office, in the afternoon, and talks him over; and he promises that the girl shall come here, without consulting me, and come she must, of course, on trial at any rate. Still, there can't be much harm done. I never saw Mercy; but the Cravens are decently born and bred and taught, I suppose. What have you so very much against them?"

"Mrs. Craven is an artful woman," answered Mrs. Raymond, earnestly, "and 'artful mother will rear artful child.' Of course she appealed to Richard rather than to you—that was always Jane Craven's way. She was a beauty ten years ago, when Mercy and you were children. She had great blue eyes that fairly looked men's hearts away, and turned their heads. She might have been married a dozen times since Craven died—if he did die—if she'd chosen. I can't see why she chose to struggle on all alone, and so poor, with that child; a second husband would have helped her so much! Ah"—with a keen look at Richard Lester, who sat, apparently reading, but really listening, in his easy-chair—"no doubt she had sufficient faith in the memory of her old attractions to feel very sure that Dick wouldn't say her nay. You admired Jane Craven, too, when you were quite a boy, Dick, didn't you?"

Her tone was one of good-natured banter merely; but Mr. Lester answered curtly, and with a frown:

"I thought her handsome, certainly—a youngster of twenty is not apt to be critical on the subject of female charms. My admiration did not induce me to marry her, however, though she was a widow, I suppose, even then; neither did it influence my decision the other day. She tells me Mercy is pretty and talented, and is buried, as one may say, in that out-of-the-way country village in Pennsylvania. What more natural than that she should wish to come here? What more than decent, cousinly kindness is there in our consenting to receive her?—which reminds

me," he added, in a pleasanter tone, "that, as she is to arrive to-night, I intended to ask Steve if he could spare a couple of hours from his love-making to go over to Jersey City and meet her."

This caused quite a general outcry. Mrs. Raymond exclaimed:

"What! to-night? I had no idea you expected her so soon!"

Stephen Raymond grumbled, and his pretty sweetheart pouted at being thus disturbed in their love-play, and Mrs. Lester, hastily putting the child down from her knee, turned upon her husband in extreme surprise.

"To-night, Dick?—and this is the first word that I have heard about it! And she was expected to-morrow! Really"—with an indignant air—"your manner of arranging Mrs. Craven's affairs without consulting me is very extraordinary. Why didn't you tell us sooner? The girl's bed must be got ready at once. Have you had a letter from her?"

"From her mother, my dear. It came only about an hour ago, and really I forgot—"

But Polly was holding out to him an eager little hand.

"Where is it? Show me the letter, Dick," with wifely confidence in his producing it.

But he did not. Though it was lying safely in his breast pocket at that moment, he did not. But he looked into his wife's eager face instead with well-simulated surprise.

"You want to see Aunt Craven's letter? Dear me, I never thought of bringing it to you. It came to the office. I'll find it for you there, if I can, to-morrow. Will that do? It's only to say that Mercy will be here at eight, and to ask that somebody may meet her."

He told that white lie glibly. Not that he was other than a truthful and honorable man with a right detestation of all fibs and subterfuges, but he knew his little wife

had a taint of jealousy in her blood, and he could not let her see Jane Craven's letter, of which a part ran thus:

"I trust to you, my dear old friend and sweetheart, to meet my girl on her arrival. By doing so you will give her an opportunity to deliver into your own hands the packet of old letters which I return to you according to my promise. Mercy will take care, in any case, to give them to you unobserved. They were precious to me as souvenirs of what I thought was a true love, but I restore them for your satisfaction and for Mercy's sake. Be kind to her, and thus keep your word to me, as I keep mine to you. Faithfully yours, JANE CRAVEN."

He hadn't any clear idea of what these letters contained. They had been written ten years ago, when the handsome widow, Jane Craven, had set his young blood afire, and a certain tinge of mystery which clung about her had turned his boyish head. But he felt guiltily conscious that he had proposed marriage to her in one of them. Ay, and with all a young man's reckless impetuosity, eagerly urged his wishes, too. What would that story sound like now? How would Polly feel if she should hear of it? Why, she rather ruled him already (this might be acknowledged in the secret depths of his own consciousness)! Give her such a string as this to harp upon, and farewell domestic peace. Besides, the absurdity of the thing! Jane Craven was almost ten years his senior. Good heavens! Suppose she had married him, and made him the (secret) laughing-stock of all his acquaintances. He drew his breath sharply with a sense of relief as he realized what an escape it was.

"Why didn't she take me?" he mused. "That has been a subject of wonder as well as thankfulness to me ever since. I was a good catch even then; and she, so much older than myself, could have had her own way with me. A worldly, crafty woman, too, as I know now—most



strange that she should have let such a chance escape her. Was she not really free to take it, I wonder? No one ever seemed to know anything of when or where Craven died—perhaps he was not dead at all. Well, no matter, since she let me go free. Once let me get those confounded letters out of her hands, and all is well!”

These thoughts had been passing through his mind while he listened idly to his wife and her mother talking. They gave him small chance for quiet musing afterward.

“At eight o’clock!” cried Mrs. Lester. “Why, good gracious, it’s seven now, and Steve will surely miss her. Why didn’t you speak sooner? You are so thoughtless, Dick! Steve dear”—to her brother—“you will go, won’t you? Whether we want the poor girl or not, we mustn’t let a poor country girl arrive in New York alone at night, and lose her way, or be insulted and frightened, perhaps, for want of some one to receive her. Ada, there, isn’t jealous of any number of country cousins, and will spare you awhile to this one, I am sure.”

At which pretty Ada laughed and blushed, and said, at first playfully, that it was nothing to her where Stephen went, and his engagements did not concern her, and then seriously, that she wouldn’t for the world have this poor girl neglected, and should think very ill of Steve if he didn’t go and look after her at once; and all the time she kept still another thought deep in her heart, though it peeped out in the wistful glance of the soft brown eyes that followed Steve as the door closed after him—a hope that those famous great blue eyes of Jane Craven might not have descended to her daughter, lest they should look Steve Raymond’s heart away, and turn his head from its allegiance to the girl who knew, by some mysterious feminine instinct, that he as yet had only played at love with her, while she, alas for her happiness and peace! only too truly loved him.

“We were so happy and merry!” she thought, starting

from a reverie with a sigh, to find the room deserted save by Mr. Lester, who was dozing, and herself; for Mrs. Lester had gone to prepare for the new-comer, and Mrs. Raymond had carried the babies away to their nurse—"so happy! I thought he was going to propose seriously to me, when Mr. Lester spoke. And then this girl—this Mercy, whose mother was a beauty, and an artful one—comes upon the scene and spoils all!" She sighed heavily, and shuddered, with a sad foreboding. "I doubt she will prove no messenger of mercy to me," she sighed, "in spite of her sweet, soft name—a minister of evil rather; my heart forebodes it."

---

### CHAPTER III.

She looked up,  
And loved him with the love that was her doom.

TENNYSON.

STEVE started on his journey, truth to tell, somewhat unwillingly. He had but little hope of reaching his destination in time to be of use, and a bootless errand, on such a night, was not a pleasant prospect, even to the kindest and most good-natured person, and Steve was very good-natured indeed. The weather was bitter cold; the streets were covered with beaten-down and frozen snow, hard as stone and slippery as glass, and he had to walk a considerable distance before he could get a car. When he finally did so, and settled himself into a seat, he sighed almost as heavily as Ada had done, with genuine regret at having been compelled to leave her.

"I do believe I should have asked her that question to which I know she'll answer 'Yes,' in another moment," he thought, "and then it would be all settled and over, and the little mother would have her heart's desire, and I should, of course, be a happy, lucky fellow. There couldn't possibly be a sweeter girl than Ada; and I am—

well, as fond of her as fellows ever are of the girls they marry, no doubt, only I don't know that I particularly care about being married. However, that's a pill that every decent fellow has to take, and nobody could sugar it over better than Ada. I shall marry Ada, of course—confound the chance that takes me away from her side, bless her bright eyes! and sends me on a cold, comfortless journey like this, for this Mercy's sake!"

He laughed to himself as the odd combination of words struck him suddenly.

"For Charity's sake, or Decency's sake would come nearer the truth," muttered he. "If she wasn't a sort of relative, one of the servants could have gone to meet her; or Dick himself might have done the gallant instead of foisting his duties off upon me. But you mustn't take these married men from their own firesides, and we single fellows have to pay the penalty. I'll marry little Ada at once, and come in for some of these pleasant privileges," he laughed. "That decides it."

By this time he was near the depot, and his natural kindness of heart getting the better of his temporary vexation, he began to feel anxious about the girl he had come to meet.

"She's only an ignorant country girl, of course," he thought, "and she will feel terribly bewildered. Poor soul! She's coming to scant kindness and a cold welcome, I fear; for Polly, kind as she is, is vexed about her coming, and nobody seems to want her at all. There's no need to let her feel that at the very first, by refusing the decent civility of meeting her. She sha'n't, either, not if I can help it and spare her. I'll do that much, really 'for Mercy's sake,' at any rate."

He hurried into the depot, ascertaining by a hasty glance at the great clock that he was full fifteen minutes late.

"But the train may be behind time too; they generally are," he thought. "That's my only chance now."

It was a chance that failed him. The train had arrived on time and discharged its passengers, and all the bustle attendant on its arrival had subsided. He looked anxiously into the waiting-room.

"She'll certainly wait awhile," he thought.

The usual quota of idlers strolling around and people waiting for the next trains were there; but no simple, timid, blue-eyed country girl, such as he had come to meet, could be seen anywhere. Perhaps she had not arrived. He turned to question one of the attendants of the room.

Had the man seen such and such a person? A young lady? Well, yes; but evidently a country girl. No; the man, after considering awhile, decided that he had not.

"There was only one passenger that hung around at all as if looking for some one to meet her," he said. "And she wasn't no country girl. I noticed her 'cause she was the out-and-out handsomest gal I ever set eyes on, and I've seen a-many. Tall and dark and proud she was, and looked around her as if the city belonged to her. I heard her mutter to herself, 'If I'm not worth meeting they're not worth waiting for,' and her black eyes flashed. That's how I know she looked for somebody. By jingo!" added the man, with a laugh, "gals with eyes like hers ain't apt to be kept waiting much. She was a beauty!"

Steve felt puzzled. This couldn't be the looked-for country girl, bred up in a mountain village.

"Did she make any inquiries?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Asked me the way out to the ferry," said the man. "By the bye, she must have been a stranger by that. Well, it ain't three minutes since she went out that way; if you hurry after her you might find her."

Steve hurried out accordingly the way the man pointed and passed along the crowded sidewalk in front of the depot, looking eagerly into every face, not so much in search of this belated beauty as of the simple and blue-



eyed little country girl whom he felt sure he had come to meet.

His generosity and chivalry were up in arms as he thought of the poor, bewildered child fresh from a tender home and cast among strangers without one kind face or voice to give her a welcoming word or smile. How frightened and heavy-hearted she must be in this busy, noisy, crowded, dangerous place, and how would she ever find her way? He glanced around him at the bustling throng, slipping and sliding over snow-ice.

“If she ever attempts to cross the street alone she’ll get knocked down and hurt to a certainty,” he muttered. “I do wish Dick Lester had spoken earlier and let me come for her in time.”

He stood still for a moment glancing around. At that instant an outcry arose close beside him. There was a piercing shriek, a Babel of voices mingled in a wild confusion of cries, prayers, oaths—the rattle of harness, the lashing of whips, and the clang and clatter of horses’ feet—and then Steve saw a woman’s form lying on the frozen road, and two horses, forced back for the moment almost on to their haunches, striking out their sharp, heavy, iron-shod hoofs in the air above her white, upturned face, from which in another moment their descent would crush the life and beauty out forever.

But they never touched her. With a cry of horror and agony Steve flung himself between her and death, and forced the struggling horses back, while others, animated by his bold example, lifted her from the ground and placed her on the sidewalk in safety. It was all done more rapidly than I can tell it, and presently Steve, shaken severely, with his arms almost torn from their sockets, and a sore bruise on one shoulder where a hoof had struck, to say nothing of torn clothes and a hat lost, was looking around, anxiously and eagerly, for the woman whose life he had saved.

No commonplace woman she; for, in spite of her recent danger and natural fright, she moved to meet him, looking wonderfully calm and smiling, though deathly pale. She had never lost consciousness through it all, but had looked her peril bravely in the face, and declining the offers of those around who volunteered to see her to some resting-place, had waited quietly for her preserver. She moved to meet him as he came to her, and frankly held out her hand.

"You have saved my life," she said; and then emotion choked her, and tears came both to eyes and voice at once.

"I believe I *have*!" answered Steve, too proud and joyful to feel his bruises. "And I thank God for it! But what else can I do to serve you? Can I call a carriage? or—or take you anywhere?"

He had forgotten the poor, neglected country cousin whom he had come to meet, and no wonder, before this woman's beauty; it was of the kind that poets dream of—dark, Juno-like, superb, and with an unusual charm of softness added at this hour by her pathetic pallor; her glorious dark eyes shining like soft stars through their tears, thrilled through every fiber of his being and charmed his soul. Alas! for Ada.

"It might be best for me to have a carriage, as I am a stranger to New York," she said, in soft, sweet tones that confirmed her beauty's spell. "I wish to go to Seventeenth Street, to the house of a Mr. Lester."

But Stephen interrupted her with a joyful cry:

"You are Mercy Craven! *Can* you be Mercy Craven indeed?"

"I am," she answered, wonderingly. "And you?"

He seized her hands in his delightedly.

"Am Steve Raymond, Dick Lester's brother-in-law, who was sent by him to meet you, but who missed the train. My dear, charming cousin, welcome!"

This kindness coming upon her loneliness and after her

danger was too much; the proud, beautiful face glowed and softened.

“ Oh, thank you!” she said, impulsively. “ It seemed so cold and lonely just at first. Thank you, both for your goodness and for my life, my kind, brave cousin.”

And she looked up into his eyes, his frank, kind, handsome eyes, so full of glowing admiration that her own sunk before them; and instinctively a line out of one of Tennyson’s idyls—the story of Elaine, with which she had beguiled the tediousness of her journey that afternoon—came into her mind, and almost seemed repeated in her ears these words:

“ She looked up,  
And loved him with the love that was her doom!”

---

## CHAPTER IV.

### MERCY.

SHORT as Mercy Craven’s experience of life had been—she was but just eighteen—its bitterness, coldness, harshness, general unsatisfactoriness had sufficed to disgust and weary her, at least with that particular phase of existence in which her lot had hitherto been cast. The tender, simple, timid girl, going forth reluctantly to earn her living among strangers, and grieving for the dear and loving home which she had left; the sorrowful and lonely little maiden who had moved Steve Raymond’s kindly sympathies had, as a matter of fact, no existence at all in Mercy Craven’s person.

She was not tender-hearted, or, if she were, none of the experiences or exigencies of her life, thus far, had made her aware of it. Neither was she gentle, further than the requirements of a lady-like demeanor rendered necessary. As for timidity, I believe she both could and would, if required, have undertaken a journey to the North Pole and back alone and unprotected, without one quickened heart-

beat or nervous tremor troubling her from the commencement of the pilgrimage to its end, especially if that end had brought her money. For, at this period of her life, if you had asked her what she esteemed the chief good of life to be, she would certainly have told you, "Money!" after which candid confession, I fear you will not think very highly of the heroine of my story, though its heroine she most undoubtedly will be in spite of this and other faults of her foolish youth, of which time and its lessons will either cure her, or else award to her the just and natural punishment.

She had left her home upon the early morning of that very day, not with regret or pain, but with rejoicing. Such a dreary home it had been to her—so mean, narrow, poor, and its life so wearily monotonous, that she had felt, as she turned her back upon it, like a bird released from a cage. It had held no loves to tear her heart at parting—though Mercy was the type of woman who can hate bitterly and love well; but the only creature who had a natural claim upon her affection had checked and curbed the girl's fresh feelings so that they were like a frozen current—hard and cold upon the surface, however strong and swift and deep might be their life beneath.

She had loved her mother dearly as a little child, and would have loved her ever, but Jane Craven had apparently exacted respect and obedience rather than affection, and, as her daughter's powers of observation grew, and she saw and felt her mother's coldness intensify into something that appeared (to the sensitive girl) almost dislike, an answering pride awoke to meet and match this coldness, and she hid her heart-wound under an armor of silence and reserve so perfect that even Mrs. Craven herself did not penetrate it nor guess how warmly the heart-fires burned beneath the crust of ice which her own unmotherly coldness had created.

It was not that the mother did not love her child, after

her own hard fashion. As there are natures and natures, so are there loves and loves. Jane Craven's nature was hard, selfish, and cold; she cared for herself the first of all. Only in two instances during her whole life-time had she for a moment forgotten herself in her love for another, and those two instances had been her husband and their child. The first of these loves—Roy Craven—had proved the blight and ruin of her life; and the second—poor Mercy—as she grew toward womanhood, and reproduced, as it were, before the angry, injured woman's eyes the father's splendid southern eyes and darkly handsome face, estranged the mother's natural tenderness from herself by reawakening the vengeful feelings of the wife against the husband who had wronged her. Jane Craven would turn away with a shudder sometimes from her young daughter's smiling face, saying, in her heart, "It is as if he dared to stand and smile before me!" And then the look which so chilled the young girl's heart was a look of dislike, indeed, and the misfortune of it was that Mercy never rightly guessed at whom that dislike was directed.

And so she grew hard and cold. Jane Craven, seeing that, was glad of it, for the girl's own sake. Her own experience had gone to show that selfish coldness is a safe armor for the heart, and that it is only when women deeply love that they can be made to suffer deeply also. "She is harder than I ever was at her age," she thought, complacently, "and colder and prouder. No man will ever take her heart out of her bosom to play with it awhile, and then throw it back broken. If she did not look so like him I might love her more, but I could do no better duty by her than I do now in checking all girlish sentiment of her nature, and teaching her that to love is to be always a fool, and often a ruined one into the bargain. She may not love me, but she will thank me some day; and, if she has her father's nature, as she has his face, I want no love of his kind. I shall have done my duty by my child at least."



People have such strange ideas of duty. It never occurred to Jane Craven to consider that this young nature, intrusted to her care, might be different from that of both father and mother, in that it was blended of each. As a fact the girl had inherited the best qualities of both parents, and therefore had so warm and frank and generous a disposition that, much as her mother's selfish teachings injured it, they could not wholly spoil; and, by the laws of compensation, they had one good effect at least: in that, by turning her feelings inward and back upon themselves, she was forced into acquiring patience, self-control, self-reliance—most useful qualities in a battle with the world.

That battle began early. Mrs. Craven's means were very small, and took the form of a monthly income, which had been hers before marriage (probably had been more potent than her beauty in tempting Roy Craven to woo her for his wife), and certainly would not have been hers long afterward, if the handsome scamp whom she had loved could have got hold of it. But Jane Craven had been much too acute and worldly wise for that. No amount of cajolery could induce her either to cancel the instrument which secured the modest monthly income to herself, or to draw for any amount or any purpose whatever, upon the principal. For how much of her wedded misery this mischievous money was answerable, who can tell?

At least, it had served her well during her long years of widowhood, enabling her and her child to live, poorly, it is true, and in an out-of-the-way mountain village, but still independently. Mercy could just remember their coming there, when she was but four years old, and what a little paradise the garden, with meadows and mountains beyond, had seemed to her baby eyes. She had had time to grow sick of them since then, and to almost hate them. So near did she come to hating her home, indeed, that when, at twelve years old, the old rector, who had taken a special interest in the handsome, talented, fatherless child, de-

clared that she had got beyond the teachings of the village school, and needed better and more suitable instruction than even he himself could give her, she hailed with joy the prospect of any change, even a change so unpromising as that which the rector purposed, namely, that as her mother had not the means of paying for her education, she should go and earn it among strangers.

So, as there seemed no better thing to be done, Mercy was sent, at barely thirteen years of age, as articulated pupil to a high-class private school in Philadelphia, where, in return for her services as a governess-drudge, she was permitted, in her leisure time, to acquire what education she could, together with some smattering of the accomplishments of a lady. The position was no worse than others of a similar kind, and better than a great many; and the girl was so patient, silent, industrious, and uncomplaining that she gradually won the good-will of teachers and principal alike, and was made much of by them, and grew to look upon the place as her home. Her home for the present—that is to say, for Mercy, at fifteen, knew as well as any one that she was beautiful, and looked forward with a purely mercenary ambition to the time when her beauty should fetch its price, which, as she calculated, should be a handsome home and a wealthy husband.

Considerations of love did not trouble her. If ever the natural, womanly hunger for love cried out in her soul, she thought it a weakness, and stifled it, and was ashamed of it. Her mother had sneered and scoffed at love—even the natural love of her own child; and none of the teachers ever spoke of such follies, and, if the girls did, what were they but silly girls? Marriage, of course!—always providing that it should lift her from the poverty she hated and place her in the golden paradise of wealth, of which she constantly dreamed. A rich marriage was her one ambition and hope—a hope that filled her mind too completely to leave any room for thoughts of love to enter there.

She remained at school through holidays and all until her seventeenth year, when Jane Craven became seriously ill and sent for her. Then long-outraged nature spoke out in the poor girl's heart. She longed for the mother who, through three years of estrangement, must have loved her still, since in her illness she sent for her. She journeyed home to the far-off village with a softened heart, full of hopes and loves that only needed a tender word and look from Mr. Craven to warm them into happy, active life. Alas! no such look awaited her. Jane Craven, who—for she had nature in her too—had anxiously desired her daughter's presence, turned away with a shudder from the beautiful dark face that greeted her so tenderly and timidly.

“You have grown like your father. Turn your face away!” she said, and turned her own face to the wall without even a kiss of welcome.

It was hard, after four years. No one ever knew how hard to Mercy, for only the moon and stars looked on her in her room that night, and saw the tears she shed over this cheated, ruined hope as she crushed it down and buried it. Ah, yes, one living friend was with her—a dog, who had not forgotten her in these years, nor ceased to love her. She held the faithful creature in her arms and pressed his glossy head against her breast, as if she were thankful for even this warm, living love to lean her lonely, aching heart against. If Jane Craven could have looked into her young daughter's room just then, she might have seen what would have been to her a revelation.

As it was, however, she only thought, half complainingly:

“How cold and hard she is! I was cold to her, it is true, but she did not care. Well, all the better for her peace, perhaps,” and never guessed at the love she had put away from her, or the cruel wrong she had dealt her daughter's heart.

## CHAPTER V.

## MOTHER AND CHILD.

WHAT wonder that life in this dull mountain home, where no soul cared for her, or understood, or sympathized with her, soon became to the lonely girl more intolerable than it had been before? Truly, Mercy had not one companion or friend, for her mother, who had recovered her health, and more than her usual coldness, was neither, and the old rector who had been so good to her was dead. To be sure there were some country lovers who, attracted by her striking beauty, would have wooed her to share their homes, if she had not almost harshly repelled them. But the girl's ambition looked far higher than these, and she met their advances with an angry scorn that at once extinguished their hopes. She a farmer's wife! Ay, or even a miller's wife (for the miller had asked her, and he was rich, according to country notions). She raged with indignation at the thought.

"Do I look as if I were meant for such a fate?" she demanded of her mother, drawing her tall figure to its full height the while, and turning the dark splendor of her flashing eyes upon her. "Me vegetate for a life-time in this wretched village, the companion of a man whom I despise, and who has not money enough to make me tolerate him! I'll go down to the mill-stream and give myself up to death rather than to the miller. I mean to move among the richest and proudest in the land. I have beauty, I know, and Heaven knows how I have toiled for education to fit me for the position I covet, and will yet command. I will!" She brought her foot down forcibly as if the obstacles between her and her ambition lay there beneath her feet to be crushed. "I will! I am sick of this life; sick of poverty; sick of this place! Mother," she went on,

passionately, "if you care for me at all, have pity on me—help me to leave this place!"

This was after she had been at home almost a year. Jane Craven had listened silently and watched her intently. She nodded acquiescence now, and answered with a cool quietude that contrasted strangely with her daughter's passion and fire:

"You have reason to know that I care for you, I think. Who else has cared for you since you were born, and what else have I cared for? Because I have not pampered and spoiled you, and made you unfit for the battle of life, which poor and beautiful young girls must fight if they would gain any of life's good gifts—because of this you think me unloving! And yet I have loved you well enough to devote my life to you; to hide myself in this dull corner of the earth lest he should take you from me! Ah!" her eyes rested on Mercy with a strangely tender and regretful look in their blue depths—"ah! that was many years ago; you were my little baby darling then, and I never thought that your sweet eyes and face would wound my heart by growing to look so like him!"

She spoke musingly, as one who thinks aloud, looking the while upon her daughter's face with the thoughtful gaze we cast upon a picture. Perhaps she was scarcely conscious herself of how much her words implied, but they gave Mercy a glimpse—the first—into that past which had been to her ever as a closed book that must never be opened. She caught eagerly at this chance of hearing something of that lost and unknown father whom she loved—in her imagination, and because he was unknown. She came and knelt down by her mother's side, where she sat brooding by the fire, and spoke passionately and impulsively:

"You have been a good, true, dutiful mother to me," she said, "but not a loving one; and I have craved for love sometimes, though you never guessed it. You say



you brought me here lest he—my father—should take me from you. Did he love me then? And was he not dead? Oh, tell me of my father! Why was I not permitted to know him? Where is he?"

Jane Craven drew her hands away, for the girl had seized and held them.

"In heaven, I hope," she answered, bitterly, "since now I know, thank God, that he is dead, indeed, and we are bound in decency to wish the dead at peace. He ruined my peace while he lived, however. 'Was he not dead?' you ask. I have long believed and hoped so, but I never knew it for a fact until a year ago, for only one year ago he died." She turned her eyes upon the fire as if she saw some vision there, and shuddered violently. "He died," she repeated, in low, distinct tones, as if reassuring herself about it. "I saw him dead."

Mercy, still kneeling by her mother's side, drew back from her a little, the better to look up into her face—a white, worn face just now, with only the ghost of its old beauty left, and something that may have been the ghost of an old love looking out of the deep-blue eyes. Hard, cold, handsome eyes Mercy had often thought them; but they were softened now.

As she gazed upon her mother a knowledge came to her like a revelation. She said to herself, "Poor woman, she has suffered much." And the conviction softened her also. She slipped her arms around her mother's waist and laid her head against her.

"Don't put me away from you," she pleaded. "Surely I should be your comforter. If he wronged you and made you suffer, be sure I will not resemble him in that, however I may in looks. You might have been the happier, perhaps, if you had let me love you. At any rate, you can forgive us, him and me, now that he is dead. Tell me about him, mother—I am no longer a child—tell me all."

Jane Craven suffered her daughter's embrace rather than returned it. The long, habitual coldness of years could not be broken at a word, however kindly; but she did endure it, and that was much from her and quite contented Mercy.

"There's not much to tell," she said, with a weary sigh. "My fate was a common one, that may happen to any woman who has the folly and ill-luck to love a man better than she loves herself. The best of men is not worth it, and I loved one of the worst. Ay," as the girl shrunk back, "those are hard words to hear of your father; but no one ever heard of him any good, and that's the worst I'll say of him to you, now or ever. Being dead let him rest. I was warned against him; but what woman ever yet listened to a warning against the man she loved? So I married him, and was miserable. What did not I suffer? Neglect, poverty, ill-usage, jealousy; the last did not trouble me long though, for he wore my love out, and then I was jealous no longer.

"Then you came, and I bound my whole life up in you, and only asked of him to go his own evil way and leave us two together. Would he do it, think you? Ay, for a price. I had a little money. We have lived on it, you and I, all your life. He wanted me to give him that, and I might take you and be free of him. He never cared how we should live—I, a pretty young girl, as I was then, with a young infant. He told me; but no, I will not tell you what he said, since he was your father. Enough that I hated him more than I had loved. You were nearly four years old. I knew he would steal you from me, and I, with my small means, should I ever get you back? I would not risk it; I stole you instead, and came here and hid all traces so carefully that he never tracked me out.

"We might have starved upon my money in the city, but it did very well for us here; and I—if I had not happiness, had peace. I called myself a widow, and hoped and

prayed that my words might prove true ones; but I had always a terror over me that he might be alive and find me out. He would impose on your credulity I thought; act love and devotion—estrangle you from a mother whom you had not found too fond, and take you away. *You*, a girl, a woman, and so pretty, in Roy Craven's hands! What would have been your fate? To save you from such a danger I lived buried here; but the loneliness and my wearing fears imbibited me, and when you grew so like him my heart hardened even to you. I would not inquire about him lest he should find me out. I deprived myself of your society in your holidays for four years, lest *he* should meet you going or returning on your journey. Oh, he was the evil genius of my life! One year ago"—she seized her daughter's hands and looked earnestly into the pale, upturned face—"I was sitting in this very room, and it was evening. I had been out and brought the 'Herald' in with me, and sat down to read it. Almost the first thing I saw was a notice of the finding of a body drowned. A man of forty, perhaps; very dark-complexioned, and on his clothes the name 'Roy Craven.' I'll show you the notice some time. It struck me down like death. The shock, the relief of knowing him dead, the horror of his having died so were too much for me, and I fainted. That was the beginning of my illness. I wouldn't give way to it; I went to New York next day to see with my own eyes if I were free, and I saw your father—the man I had so loved and feared, and hated—*dead!*"

She gasped and sunk back in her chair overcome by the recollection. Mercy, who had listened intently, pale as death, spoke in an awed whisper:

"You were *sure*? You knew him?"

Mrs. Craven nodded.

"Ay, I knew him. There was some white mixed with his black hair, but years did *that* of course; and the eyes—though I pushed back the lids a little to look at them—

seemed smaller than Roy's eyes were; but then he had lain in the water awhile, and death and time are mighty change-workers; oh, yes, I knew him. The name was written on his shirt by his own hand (he always used to mark everything belonging to him; I wondered it wasn't on his other clothes), and he wore upon his finger an old gypsy ring that he was superstitious about. Oh! it was certainly Roy Craven."

Mercy persisted still:

"The face—you would recognize the face?" she said.

Jane Craven shuddered violently.

"There was no face!" she answered, in a low tone of horror. "I would not have told you *this* if you had not asked. The features had been all beaten in, only the eyes were perfect. The skull was crushed and broken too, and there was a deep, gaping knife-wound in the side of the neck. Ugh! I fancy I can see it still! Is it any wonder that the sight nearly killed me? I loved him once. But he went foul ways and came to a foul end. Child, your father had been murdered!"

---

## CHAPTER VI.

### ROY CRAVEN.

THERE was confidence and amity between mother and daughter after this, and Jane Craven bestirred herself to advance the girl's interests by liberating her from the prison of her home.

"You shall go to New York," she said. "I think I have sufficient interest with Richard Lester to get you into his family for awhile. He made a fool of himself about me once, and would not like it known—for he is a conceited fool. I'll go and talk to him. The Lesters and the Raymonds are rich, especially James Raymond, the eldest of the sons. He has the store, and is a born money-get-

ter. If you can please him you may be content to take him. The younger son is well off too, but I think he is married, or going to be. If you can become an inmate of Richard Lester's home (I should have made it your own home if your father had died long ago)—your own wits and your beauty must do the rest. First let me see if I can place you there."

How Mrs. Craven succeeded in her design my readers already know. She was an unscrupulous woman, who held that life owed her some share of ease and comfort, and she would secure them, at any rate for her child, by what means she could. Her treachery to Polly Lester (it was something very like treachery to deceive her so, at whose table she sat, and whose courtesy she accepted) did not trouble her at all.

"There really is nothing in the letters," she told herself; "but if I can make capital out of them, why shouldn't I? It is for Mercy's sake. And I can't help it that Richard is a fool."

And so, working upon his vanity and his fears, she secured Mr. Lester's promise.

Then she went shopping, and purchased many pretty things for Mercy, among them enough black silk to make a dress.

"Out of my savings," she said, as she laid these treasures before the girl on her return. "Oh, yes, I saved a little out of my little during the four years you were at school; pinched myself many a time for Mercy's sake, while Mercy thought I was forgetting her. Ah, child," she added, with something like tenderness in her eyes and tone, as the young girl kissed her, "I can forgive you for looking like your father now, since he is dead."

She seemed, indeed, like another person to the girl ever since the day of that sad confidence. The ice of estrangement and misunderstanding once broken between them, congealed no more. As they worked and planned to-



gether, preparing Mercy's very modest outfit for her first adventure, they talked hopefully of happiness to come.

"Your beauty is about all you have," the mother said, "and you must turn it to account. Fortunately, you will look handsomer in a calico gown than other women do in silks and satins. Polly Lester will try to keep you in the background, of course, but you must not suffer that. You are going to New York to be seen and admired, and to sell yourself in the best market, remember. Appeal to Mr. Lester if his wife snubs you; he's afraid of me; for, though I send his silly letters back, I keep my tongue, and he would not like me to use it. Meantime I am here in the old dull home, if ever you should need its shelter. Thank Heaven I have trained you sensibly, so that you know where your true interest lies, and will be in no danger of making the same mistake your mother did, and spoiling all your life for the sake of love!"

The scorn with which she spoke that word might almost have stung the ears that heard it; but Mercy's sentiments, at this period of her life, were fully in accord with her mother's.

"There is not much danger of my being a fool," she answered, curtly—"thanks to your training, mother. I understand it better now than I did, and I thank you. There would be small excuse for a girl so taught, indeed, and I never could comprehend this passion of love conceived for a stranger hitherto unknown, who suddenly becomes to a woman more than home, friends, name, ay, life itself. Your love will satisfy me, and to feel that I possess it has all the charm of novelty. When I secure this rich husband, who is to give me wealth and home, you must come to live with me always."

And Jane Craven smiled, well pleased at the girl's idea. But when, a few days later, Mercy confided to her another dutiful intention, which was to be put into execution by this same anticipated husband's wealth, she no longer smiled.

“ I mean to make him find and bring to justice my poor father’s murderer,” the girl announced to her. “ No matter what were his faults, mother, no one had a right to cruelly murder him; and the wretch who did so shall not go unpunished when I have means to seek for him. I will tell my husband—when I get one—”

“ You will tell him nothing, absolutely nothing about your father, except that he is dead,” Mrs. Craven interrupted, hastily. “ The past must be left to rest, and he must rest in the grave his own crimes made for him. I would speak mildly if I could; I would spare his memory to his child if she would let me, but she will not. Hear all the truth then. Your father was a scoundrel—disreputable, dishonorable, a swindler, a blackleg, a thief! To marry his daughter would be accounted a disgrace by any decent man. Roy Craven was of low origin; his mother a wandering gypsy girl; his father—who can tell? Did I marry him knowing this? Certainly not. I took him on his own showing, and he cheated me as he cheated all who trusted him. Is it for me or mine to make a fuss about his death, and publish our disgrace in having belonged to him? He would not have put his hands together, living, to do a good turn; and will you blight the prospects of your life to find out the manner of his dying? Be content, as I am, to thank God that he is dead. And it is well we spoke of this, for the Raymonds and Lesters may question you. If they do, remember that I never spoke of him to you. You know nothing of your father, now or never, except that he is dead.”

This was the girl’s last lesson before parting, and again its effect was to crush a natural tenderness and harden her young heart.

“ This was the man my mother spoiled her life for,” she thought. “ If ever I love a man I shall despise myself. No; wealth for me, not love!”

And she thought no more of revenging her father’s vio-

lent death; and Jane Craven's parting warning: "Remember, he is dead!" spoken meaningly, as the train moved out of the depot, was quite unnecessary to remind her of her own interests.

So the girl went forth to meet the fate she knew not of, and the love she mocked at and despised, and the mother returned, with heavy heart and step, to the home that must now appear so lonely.

Somehow she hated to go into the house, so turned aside at the entrance to the lane, and was walking toward the woods when a neighbor met her.

"Oh, there's been a man inquiring for you," said this woman, "and I showed him the way to your cottage. He'll be in the garden now most likely." So Jane turned back again to see.

He was in the garden now. A tall, strongly built, swarthy fellow who, lounging heavily, with his back against the porch, to wait, had thrust a pipe between his lips, and pulled a slouched hat low down upon his brow to keep the clear, bright, wintery sunshine out of his eyes. The same sunshine was shining into Jane's eyes too, or perhaps a tear shed at that recent parting blinded her; but she could not think where she had seen this man before, though something about him seemed to her familiar. She wished she had not had to see him now, however, when she so much desired to be alone, and so she spoke to him sharply:

"I hear you were asking for me, sir. What is your business with me?"

The man sprung to his feet at the sound of her voice, and stared at her for a minute from under his hat with a muttered oath of surprise.

"By ——! how changed!" she heard him mutter, and an awful trembling seized her at the tone.

"Who are you? oh, who are you?" she gasped, scarce knowing what she said.

He flung the hat aside, and her own groan of anguish and horror answered her.

“Great God! Is it you? Not dead—not dead in spite of all! You—Roy Craven!”

---

## CHAPTER VII.

### ALREADY!

A CARRIAGE was quickly procured, and after driving round to the baggage-room for Mercy's trunk—a very modest affair indeed, at which Polly Lester afterward turned up her nose contemptuously, the two cousins started off for Seventeenth Street.

I call them “cousins,” chiefly because Steve was in such haste to claim the title, which really belonged to him by little more than courtesy, however, for Jane Craven's actual relationship to the Raymonds was probably some dozen times removed. To call them “sweethearts,” even at this early stage of their acquaintance, would be much nearer to the truth, for already Steve had forgotten the pretty face and wistful eyes that were watching for him at this very moment—forgotten that the world contained any other woman than the one who sat smiling by his side; while she, on her part, was conscious of a singular interest in this stranger, and felt her cheeks burn as a speculation arose swiftly in her mind whether *this* might be that “younger son,” of whom Jane Craven had spoken, as being “also well to do, but either married or going to be.” Something like a pang smote Mercy's heart at that word “married.”

“I hope he is not!” she confessed to her own soul. “If he is only ‘going to be,’ there may not be much harm done. He shall not, if *I* can prevent him. Love is nonsense, of course, but I could really like this man, and since one must marry, better marry one who is agreeable at

least. Since you are rich, my pleasant, handsome Cousin Steve, who knows but you may some day be my husband!"

Meantime Steve, who, wholly unsuspecting of his fair companion's dreams, would nevertheless have desired nothing better than to make them realities, was exerting himself to please her and make her forget her recent danger and alarm; and presently had succeeded so well that she had been laughing heartily at his description of the simple little country girl for whom she had been looking and waiting. And Steve laughed merrily too, as he thought of the astonishment of Mr. Lester's household, when, in a few minutes' time, he should introduce this beauty into their midst.

"They will not expect a girl like you any more than I did," he told her, with his usual frankness. "Polly—ha, ha, ha! it makes me laugh! Polly spoke of you as 'a poor little ignorant country girl,' arriving in New York at night and alone, and perhaps getting frightened and lost. You wouldn't get lost, Cousin Mercy; and you were not even very much frightened I think. How did you contrive to hold on to that satchel so cleverly?" with a glance at a small black leather bag, which indeed had never left her hand through all her danger. "You must have as much nerve and pluck as you have beauty, my fair cousin, if you actually held it in your hand all the time!"

The compliment was so point-blank and outspoken that it would have been offensive to many women; and indeed might have been so to this woman coming from any other man. But this man had saved her life and won her gratitude; this man had come to her when she was feeling solitary, slighted, sore at heart, and had soothed her wounded pride and cheered her loneliness, and reconciled her to her new circumstances and surroundings; moreover, there was nothing coarse in Steve's outspoken bluntness; on the contrary, his pleasant voice, winning manner, and a certain merry, boyish style and air, made him extremely lov-



able and pleasing. Besides which, Mercy believed him to be one of the two wealthy brothers whom her mother had told her she might do well to win. For all these reasons she only smiled and blushed at his blunt admiration, and felt, on the whole, gratified at having attracted it. And perhaps there was another reason still, if one could pierce into such mysteries. Perhaps into every woman's life some man comes like a fate; and Mercy, all unconsciously to herself and him, had met her fate in Steve Raymond.

Be this as it may, one thing is certain: that these two young people on their very first acquaintance pleased each other mightily. The drive from the depot to Seventeenth Street seemed as brief as pleasant to them, though both involuntarily grew silent and somewhat grave as they neared their destination.

Secretly (for neither confided the feeling to the other), they were both feeling rather anxious about the reception in store for the new-comer. Mercy, with that natural anxiety made up half of antagonism and half of fear which the "poor relation" always feels on approaching richer kindred; Steve, with a keen recollection of his sister's unwillingness to receive this new inmate into her household, and a presentiment that her unusual beauty would not be likely to make her welcome any more warm. Occupied with these thoughts, silence had fallen between them as the carriage drew up before Mr. Lester's house in Seventeenth Street.

Truth to tell, Polly Lester was peeping from behind the curtains, and let them fall as she turned away on hearing the coachman's knock.

"She mustn't see us watching," she said to Ada, half ashamed of her own curiosity. "It might make her think too much of herself, and she must be made to keep her place; I don't expect to like her."

A notion in which Mrs. Raymond was quick to coincide.

But kind-hearted Ada could not bear that the stranger,

just coming among them—shy, timid, sore of heart no doubt, should be thus harshly prejudged; she looked at the two ladies reproachfully.

“I don’t see why you should make up your mind to dislike her, Polly,” she said, gently. “She may be very nice. For my part I feel sorry for the poor lonely girl, coming to those who have no welcome to give her, and I mean to do my best to be very kind to her. We are so near of an age that perhaps we may be friends.”

“And when you and Steve get married she can come and help you to keep house!” laughed Polly, careless that she brought the conscious crimson to Ada’s cheek. “All right, my dear, I don’t object; all I say is that I don’t want her. There, there,” as Ada was about to answer her; “don’t trouble to deny that you and Steve are sweet-hearts, because I prefer to believe my eyes; and besides, he might hear you, for here he comes and Mercy with him.”

They all arose as the door opened, and Steve entered, torn, dirty, and disordered in dress, but radiant with pleasure. Ada’s foreboding heart sunk low at sight of his glowing face.

“Here she is!” he cried, as if he took it for granted that all would share in his own very evident pleasure. “Here’s Mercy!”

And he drew Mercy Craven into the room, where first a low murmur and then a startled silence was for awhile her only greeting. She stood in their midst with large, inquiring eyes fixed on Polly’s face, very silent, very pale; somewhat reserved and proud, as one who feels doubtful of her welcome; attired very simply and plainly indeed, but oh, so beautiful!

Ada looked from the dark, proud, lovely face to Stephen’s eyes, and read in them her own doom; she turned away with a sickening sensation at her heart.

“Already,” she thought; “already she has supplanted

me. Already he forgets my love, my hopes, his own professions; I am despised and cast aside for Mercy's sake. Already!"

---

## CHAPTER VIII.

"WHICH SHALL WIN HIM?"

POLLY was the first to recover herself and come forward to welcome her guest. She did so with considerable grace (under the circumstances), but not cordially, as Mercy was quick to feel. Polly took the pale girl by the hand and led her to a seat beside the fire.

"You must forgive me," she said, easily; "I was so startled at the sight of you; you are not quite like the ordinary type of country girls. Besides, I thought you would look like your mother, but you do not, does she, Dick? This is my husband, Mr. Lester, my dear."

"She is handsomer than her mother ever was," Mr. Lester answered, much to his wife's secret indignation. "You are welcome, Mercy; I don't wonder that you didn't care to hide yourself in a mountain village all your life; a girl like you will find a better fate in New York. Polly, my love, she must be both tired and hungry after her journey."

Mercy confessed to being both, but nevertheless Steve's torn coat and lost hat had to be accounted for; and so the story of her danger and bravery, and his prompt aid were told, and excited general admiration. Mrs. Raymond, however, noticed his enthusiasm with a certain uneasiness. The almost tender glance with which Mercy's splendid dark eyes lingered on him while he spoke did not escape her, nor the wistful expression and sudden pallor of Ada's usually rosy face. The prudent little mother—made by stern experience worldly wise—took instant alarm.

"He has taken a fancy to this girl," she thought. "For her sake, if the folly be not checked at once, he will

throw over Ada, the sweet, the good, who loves him. And Ada is an heiress, while Mercy, like himself, is penniless; such a marriage would be madness—they must be kept apart. Why did I allow him to go and meet her—Jane Craven's child—and I knowing what her mother is? I will go home at once!"

A resolution which she put into immediate execution, much to Steve's disgust, since her going home necessitated his accompanying her.

"Mercy must be tired, and you have preparations to make, of course," she said to Polly; "and I am not very well, so we will leave you. Besides, Steve must need rest after his adventure; and I am anxious to be assured that he has no bones broken. I am very glad, of course, that he was able to save you, Cousin Mercy" (with anything but a cordial or friendly glance at the silently observant girl), "neither will Ada," turning to her and thus skillfully-dragging her into the question; "neither will Ada regret that she spared him to do so good a deed. You are to come to us to-morrow for the whole day, remember," she added to Ada; "and I advise you to come along now, and let Steve and me see you home."

An arrangement which (as poor Ada gladly acquiesced in it) screened her from the reproach which she read in her son's eyes and on his indignant brow, and which would have inevitably fallen upon her as soon as Ada was safely got out of the way, had she not anticipated it by at once breaking into earnest reproaches herself.

"I am ashamed of you!" she cried, to his infinite discomfort and dismay. "You come in with that black-browed, gypsy-looking girl, and talk to her and of her as if there wasn't another woman in the world, while your own charming sweetheart is standing by unnoticed, evidently slighted and hurt. There never was a better, sweeter girl than Ada West, and better and wiser men than you are, my son, might and would be proud of her

affection. My heart ached to see the wound you gave her by your thoughtless slight to-day; you deserve nothing better than to lose her."

Steve listened like one stunned. His flirtation with Ada had been to him a very pleasant pastime, to which he might some day bind himself seriously, or from which he might consider himself wholly free. To have it spoken of and looked upon as an actual engagement, filled him with a sudden and strange dismay; strange, because only a few hours ago he would not have cared one straw about it.

"I don't quite understand you, mother," he said, gravely and anxiously. "You speak as if Ada and I were actually engaged. It is not so, I assure you; I have never said one serious word that could bind me to her."

"The more shame for you!" answered the little mother quite passionately in her indignation. "And the sooner you do speak seriously to her, the better for your own honor's sake. Else you will make me believe you that contemptible creature—a male flirt. What? you trifle with this innocent girl's heart, you seek her company, profess to admire her, win her young affection, compromise her in the eyes of the world—for all your acquaintances look upon it as a match—and then because your fancy changes you whistle her down the wind, and shelter yourself behind the mean excuse that you have 'never said anything serious.' Say it at once then. Say what you have given her the right to expect to hear: ask her to be your wife!"

Steve answered rather sullenly:

"I don't know about 'giving her the right,' mother. We have flirted together, Ada and I, and that's about all. She may have been no more in earnest than I was; I hope she hasn't!"

"You know better!" answered Mrs. Raymond, keeping him to actual facts with a resolution that would not be put aside. "You know she loves you. Yesterday it pleased



your vanity well enough to see this good and pretty creature so fond of you; and I hoped that her real love and actual worth would, when she became your wife, win such a return as they merit. I hope so still. You are bound in honor to propose to her. You have given her cause to expect it. No man has a right to trifle with the heart of a pure woman, and then wonder at her love for him, as if he had assumed her to be a worthless coquette. A woman's love is a sacred and serious thing, and the man who wrecks it—whether in deliberate villainy or in thoughtless vanity—too often wrecks her whole life. You must not commit this crime. You must propose to Ada at once.”

Her earnestness overpowered the young man; perhaps the truth of her words convinced him too, yet he made one struggle more.

“I have heard you say that only love makes marriage really sacred,” he said, earnestly. “I do not love Ada so that I desire her for the partner of my life. Have I then the right to marry her?”

But Mrs. Raymond was not to be entrapped so; she stuck to truths and facts persistently.

“If you could not love her enough to marry her you had no right to seek and win her love,” she said. “Having done this cruel wrong it is your duty to abide the consequences. They will not be very terrible. No man whose heart was free could long withhold true love from such a wife as Ada will be; and your heart is free, of course, my son? I need not ask you.”

He did not answer that. He could not. The question puzzled his own soul. Was his heart free? Up before his mental vision rose a queenly form, a darkly splendid face, a pair of star-like eyes whose gaze inthrilled him; did he love their owner? He shook himself and sighed impatiently and could not tell.

Mrs. Raymond, glancing sideways at his brooding face, forbore to urge him for an answer. She saw that Mercy

had charmed him, but she did not believe it to be a real love. Otherwise, and had he owned it to her, she was much too sensible and honest not to have acknowledged that "two wrongs could never make a right," and that to offer his hand to Ada while Mercy held his heart, would only be adding a second and worse injury to the first one.

"But it is only a fancy," she reassured herself. "Once let Ada be his wife and he will wonder how he could ever have admired that gypsy!"

"That gypsy," meantime, had had some supper, and pleading fatigue, retired to the room which Mrs. Lester's hospitality had provided for her. She did not, however, retire to rest immediately, but sat down awhile to think.

"I am not welcome here," she muttered to herself. "Ah, well! if every man's hand be against me, so shall my hand be against every man. Steve likes me—Steve will love me very soon—and I like Steve. That pretty girl is my rival, though, and she has his mother on her side, and the mother has taken fright at me already. She doesn't want her wealthy son to marry a penniless bride. We must do our love-making secretly, I foresee, if I am to win him—and mother said I might be content to win him. Well, I'll try. My pretty rival—she is pretty!—and I will fight for him, and let Fate decide between us. I wonder if they are actually engaged? I hope not."

And so, wondering and tired out, she fell asleep, whispering to herself that Stephen was a pretty name, and repeating it softly, with a smile. But she had forgotten now that line of Tennyson's which had sounded in her soul when first she looked up into Stephen's face—that line which, reminding her of fair Elaine's fate, seemed sorrowfully forewarning her of her own. Was poor Elaine herself as ignorant, I wonder, when first the fatal spell of Lancelot's eyes fell on her—when she, an innocent and happy soul, looked up into the brave knight's face, "and loved him with the love that was her doom?"

## CHAPTER IX.

## IN JANE CRAVEN'S GARDEN.

THERE was in the cottage garden an old, wide-spreading cherry-tree, with a rustic seat under its branches—those branches so softly, sweetly pink and white with bloom in summer-time, so stiff and hard and hoar with white frost now, they might have served as an emblem of Jane's life, in the first beautiful promise of its spring, and now in its wintery blighting. Upon this rustic seat the woman sunk, her limbs refusing to support her, and her heart in her bosom felt as cold as the snow beneath her feet, and her face looked like the ashen-gray face of the dead. Even the man who watched her, rough and hard and callous as he was, felt a passing pang of pity for her distress, and softened his harsh tones as he addressed her.

“I've startled you,” said he. “Well, that's natural. Of course you thought me dead. But I ain't going to harm you.” Then, pausing for some word of answer and receiving none, but seeing that she still stared at him in silent horror, he added, more impatiently: “Come, come! you didn't use to be so nervous. Your face looks just like death. Get up and let me help you into the house and out of the cold, for God's sake!”

And he held out a hand as if to raise her; but she, recovering herself a little and shrinking away from him, with a gesture of hatred and disgust, waved him back:

“Don't touch me!” she cried, earnestly, in low, hoarse tones of strong excitement. “And understand that whatever you have to say to me must be said here. Fourteen years ago—isn't it?—fourteen years ago since I said and swore that the same roof should never shelter you and me again together. Never, with my consent—not for one single hour. Say what you've come to say, here and now, and then go your way again and leave me.”

She drew herself up closer to the tree as she spoke, and sat up erect, though trembling with passionate excitement. Roy Craven regarded her with an evil scowl; all that was worst in his bad nature roused into life by her defiance.

“So!” he said, very deliberately. “This is the welcome you give your husband, is it? The loving husband whom you abandoned after robbing him of his child. Don’t think that I’ve come after you, you Jezebel! No; but I’ve come for my daughter. She’s a handsome girl, the people hereabouts tell me—”

She interrupted him, forgetting her horror of him so far as to lay an eager hand upon his arm.

“Stop! Let us understand each other. Have you told any of the people about here that my Mercy is your child? Have you?”

He hesitated for a moment. He wanted to frighten her, but her imperative tones and passionate eyes compelled the truth. Besides, what was the use of deceiving her? She could ascertain the truth from the neighbors, so he answered, sullenly:

“I’ve told no one anything yet. I asked where you lived, and whether your daughter was with you; and they told me—you know what gossips country people are—that Mercy Craven was such a real beauty as folks don’t often see, and might take her pick for a husband if she would from the richest men in the place.” He glanced contemptuously around him over the surrounding hills and woods and plains. “I shouldn’t think by the looks of things that millionaires were lying round here quite as thick as flies in August, and my daughter—if she’s half what they seem to say—ought to marry a millionaire and make all our fortunes. To be candid with you, I intend her to make mine, at any rate. I mean to take her to San Francisco. I’ve a friend there; she shall be seen by men that’ll pay for beauty. She shall marry a millionaire if she’ll play her cards well, and ride in her carriage with her

loving papa by her side. What! You're a woman of the world, I guess; you couldn't wish better for her than I'll do by her. Where is she?"

He glanced round toward the house with that question, as if he expected to see the darkly beautiful face that had been described to him look forth from one of the windows. Jane Craven saw the action, and clasped her hands.

"She's out of your reach, thank God!" she cried, with much more fervent thanksgiving than was usual with her. "Fate must have taken pity on the girl, I think, and moved me to put her out of the way where you shall never find her!"

She sprung up from her seat with those words, and stood up to confront him. Whether the consciousness of Mercy's safety gave her courage, or whether her fear of him, like the shock of his unexpected appearance, was passing away, I can not tell, but all her old spirit and temper seemed to have suddenly revived.

She spoke in tones that, though cautious and low, were firm and clear, and her blue eyes flashed hatred and scorn as she regarded him.

"You do well by her!" she cried, with bitter contempt. "You, who would have robbed her of the miserable pittance on which I have supported her; you, who to-day would sell her for a price, ay, though it were to ruin and dishonor, if you could!"

"I don't forget the advice you gave to me years ago when I was a pretty girl; I know you, Roy Craven! 'Men that will pay for beauty' forsooth. God forbid that my beautiful girl should fall into the hands of friends of yours. I've placed her with people who have character as well as wealth, and I've told her all your story—who and what you were—and she blushes for her father and despises him.

"Don't think to find her the soft-hearted girl you found me. I've made her hard as you made me hard, and she wouldn't hear you. Hear you!" she added, with a sudden



recollection striking her. "Why should she? Why should I? Who and what are you? Mercy knows that her father is dead—I have taught her so. I, who saw him dead, and identified him as he lay murdered!

"Ha!" with flashing eyes fixed on him, and finger pointed accusingly at his evil face, that whitened to a ghastly pallor at that word—"ha! I say murdered! I identified Roy Craven by his linen and his ring, but the features I was once so fond of had been beaten out of all human form by the hand of a brutal murderer. Who are you that dares come here to me and claim to be my husband?

"I swear that Roy Craven is dead and buried! Make but one movement, say but one word"—her voice dropped to a deep and threatening tone—"to injure my child or molest me in any way, and as God sees me, I will denounce you as an impostor!" She threw back her head with a defiant gesture, and looked him full and boldly in the face.

"And not that alone," she went on, resolutely; "you have come here in that dead man's name to intimidate me—me"—drawing herself up proudly—"his widow, who stood beside his corpse so lately, and paid to have it laid in a decent grave. If you know so much about Roy Craven, may be you can tell us how this dead man died. One word from you to trouble mine or me, and I will denounce you as his murderer!"

---

## CHAPTER X.

### AWKWARD QUESTIONS.

HER intense and menacing tones, although she barely spoke above her breath, seemed to ring so clearly through the silent, frosty air that the man cast an involuntary glance of alarm around him, and came a step toward her with uplifted hand, as if to silence her. All his bold air of braggadocio had departed, however, and his gesture was

one of entreaty rather than menace. He had turned pale, under all his swarthy color, with a ghastly, sickly pallor that reached his very lips, which were parched as well as trembling, for he had to moisten them with his tongue before he could speak; and, as he spoke, he cast that frightened, furtive glance around once more behind the tree, behind the garden hedge, behind and around the little house itself, as if to assure himself there were no listeners.

Then he recovered himself a little, and tried to laugh, rubbing his white lips with his open palm the while as well as moistening them.

"You're a Tartar!" he said, with a most uneasy attempt at easiness. "It don't matter much what you say so long as no one's by to hear you, and women must talk or die, they say; but such talk as that—about murder and such nonsense—isn't pleasant, even in jest, if it was overheard. You know well enough that I'm Roy Craven. Why, you owned to it when you saw me first."

"Not before witnesses," answered Jane, sitting down again beneath the tree, quite self-possessed and cool, now that she saw her advantage. "'It doesn't much matter what I say,' you know," giving him back his own words with some of her own venom in their tone, "'so long as no one's by to hear me.' When I speak before a witness you'll find it not very much to your advantage, I promise you. And as to speaking in jest, don't be too sure of that either. If you are Roy Craven, as you claim, how came you to let this murdered man be buried in your name, and how came he to wear your linen and your ring? Awkward questions you'd find these, my man, if it was a magistrate that asked them!"

He did not answer her. He was silently regarding her with a look so evil that it might have struck a chill of terror to any woman's heart, being encountered in this lonely place from a known enemy. But it did not frighten

Jane; she answered it in words and at once, coldly and scornfully:

“You’d like to send me after the dead man, to ask those questions of his soul,” she said, “if you could do it safely. I read that much in your eyes. But it can’t be done, unless you’re willing to swing for it. In this frosty, silent country air, sound carries far, and one scream from me would bring the people from those cottages. Besides”—she laid a firm hand on her bosom—“living so much alone as I do, I think it safest to go armed, and I’ve a tiny pistol here,” pressing the hand upon her breast, “that is no plaything, I assure you. Best not provoke me to show you what a markswoman I have grown. You know of old that I can take my own part if you put me to it!”

While she spoke—evidently with desperate earnestness—his look of hatred and menace had changed to one of surprise that gradually merged into actual admiration. He gave a long, low, astonished whistle before he answered her.

“This is my wife Jennie, is it? Pretty little, pining, whining Jane! Well, I’m—” he brought his hand down on his thigh with a sounding slap, and finished the sentence with an oath. “Did I know you of old? No, by the Lord! Not for the woman you are! If I had, a trifle of money should never have parted us. And could you take your own part in those days? Ay, on the sly, and in secret, and by running away; not with the spunk and grit of a man, as you do to-day, though. I believe you both could and would shoot me,” with an amused laugh, “if I provoked you to it. But I’m not anxious to. I don’t want to vex you at all. Come now,” with a conciliatory air and tone, “we two are the parents of a handsome young girl; why shouldn’t we lay our heads together to benefit her and ourselves? Why shouldn’t we be friends?”

And he would have come toward her with those words, but she waved him back again.

"I don't choose my friends from your sort," she said, contemptuously. "You were a fine friend to me fourteen years ago, were you not?"

He laughed uneasily.

"I don't know as I was anything else," he said. "I never meant to take the child from you; no, nor the money either. You were a silly girl, that knew no better than take a man at his word, let him be ever so angry and hasty. And you've borne me malice all these years for another idle word too that was no more in earnest than the other. What if I did tell you that such a pretty girl as you were need never want for money so long as men were flush of dollars and short of brains. It was a rough, gypsy joke of mine, no more. You didn't take the hint I gave, so it did no harm. Besides," the look of unpleasant admiration deepened in his eyes, "besides, I was young, and a fool myself too in those days. I shouldn't say so now. Try me again, Jane."

He held out his brown hands to her, but did not venture near.

"Whatever you've lost of beauty and youth you've gained in pluck and good sense; and I wouldn't wish for a smarter, better partner. Come. You've had this girl of ours on your own hands all your life, now let me share the task and show you where and how to turn her beauty to profit for us all. For us all, mind," very earnestly as he met her coldly thoughtful and half-contemptuous glance. "It's no more for my own or your profit I'm planning than for hers. Come, give a man credit for feeling a little interest in his own child. I used to be fond of her, you know, when she was a little one. I've got a plan for her that'll make her rich, I tell you. Let's be friends then, for Mercy's sake?"

And again he would have come toward her, and again she kept him off with outstretched hands and coldly scornful eyes.

“Keep your distance,” she said, quietly. “I’m not a girl to believe all a man says, now, remember. I give you credit for ‘a little interest’ in your child, very little, and a good deal of interest in yourself at the same time; and I’ll hear what are these precious plans of yours concerning her. But first, and before we go any further, I’ll hear something else. If you’re Roy Craven, where have you been and what has been your life for these fourteen years? If you’re Roy Craven, who and what was the man whom I saw dead, and whose body lies buried at my expense under your name, wearing your linen shirt, and upon his finger your own dead mother’s ancient gypsy ring?”

---

## CHAPTER XI.

### ROY’S STORY.

HER blue eyes, hard and clear as polished steel and cold as if they had stolen their light from the surrounding snow, were fixed on his as if to read his soul.

He could not get away from them. He stood silent, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, with bent head and half-downcast eyes; but still glancing up through long, black, gypsy lashes to meet that accusing gaze.

Jane waited with evident impatience for his answer, and receiving none, spoke again.

“Who was the man?” she demanded, sternly. “You need not fear to answer me when none are by to hear you. Who was the man I buried? How came he by your clothes and by his death? Did you?”—she came a little closer, and still looking straight into his eyes whispered the next words low—“did you kill him?”

But low as the whisper was it terrified him. He sprung toward her, and before she guessed his purpose, laid a heavy, coarse brown hand upon her mouth.

“Shut up, confound you! Are you mad?” he growled,



with a muttered curse and a fearful look around him. "Are you mad?"

Jane sprung to her feet, and struck the heavy hand away contemptuously.

"You coward!" she said, deliberately, "what are you afraid of? No one is near enough to hear us speak, unless we raise our voices; nor do I wish to harm you, so you let me alone. If you're Roy Craven, I've no desire to see my child's father hung, however well he may deserve it; and if, on the other hand, you are the villain that killed him, I don't consider that your crime did me any bad turn; I had no cause to mourn my husband's loss, you see. Sit down there"—she pointed to the stump of an old tree close by, while she herself resumed her rustic seat—"and answer my questions quietly, and don't use your hands again, as you've just done, or some of the neighbors will see you and come to my aid." She laughed coldly as she said that. "We don't want their company, I guess. Now"—with a look and tone of command, which he instinctively and unconsciously obeyed—"who was the man I buried?"

"Black Ned, my cousin," he answered, sullenly; "you remember him well enough. We were as like as two peas, always; and when he—when he"—it was as if something stuck in his throat just there, he paused so long—"when he died"—his handsome, shifty eyes roved around and away from Jane's, meeting a nod from her and a meaning smile—"when he died—having some things o' mine upon him by chance—I thought to let the mistake go, on the hope of finding you. A trap, you'll say; but I swear to you I set it accidentally—though"—with a dark smile—"it has done better than a carefully laid one might, in snaring the game I wanted, and that game was you, Jane"—assuming a lighter tone—"and at last I've got you!"

If he really thought he had got her, however, he made no attempt to touch or take her—probably warned by her

thoughtfully brooding eyes and frowning face to be chary of pressing his claims. Such as they were, Jane's next words quietly ignored them.

"So it was Ned, was it?—no wonder I thought him like you! And Ned is dead?—well, the rest of mankind are better for his death, any way. Now, who killed him?"

At that question all his heavy sullenness returned, and his eyes, that had been fixed on hers, began to rove around again.

"How the devil should I know who killed him?" he answered, passionately. "I don't know that anybody killed him at all. He was drunk when I saw him last, and—and afterward they found him in the river. His face may have beaten against boats or stones, or perhaps the fishes—"

Jane interrupted him sharply.

"Did you go to look at him after he was dead?" she asked.

"*Me?*"—with a look of terror—"not likely!—what do you suppose I'd want to look at a horrible thing like that for? Most likely he was—"

She interrupted him again, just as before.

"How do you know his face was crushed and spoiled, then? How do you know he was a horrible thing to see? There, there"—as he first shrunk and then turned on her a face of livid whiteness—"haven't I told you I wish you no harm? Why are you afraid of me? I hated Ned, you know—but I'll ask no more about his death. The one thing I must know, and *will* know, is this: how came your shirt and ring upon him?"

He answered that with an air of relief, as if reassured by her words and manner.

"Very simply and naturally. Ned and I had been sort of partners for years after you left. We traveled together, playing a sharp game and living on our wits, sometimes well, sometimes ill, according as the luck went with us.

One while we had a traveling show, another we kept a gambling place, and there trouble came and we separated. I hadn't seen him for a long time before that last day we met. I'd been 'most everywhere in the meantime; suffering my share, you can bet, and finally had scraped a few dollars together, no matter how. He hadn't a red. Not a red cent had Ned, nor scarcely a rag to cover him, and hungry into the bargain. Well, I took him to my room and gave him a better coat than his own, and a clean shirt to make him comfortable, do you see?"

He paused for her answer. Jane, leaning an elbow on her knee and supporting her chin in her hand, nodded understandingly.

"I see," said she, quietly. "I believe you're telling truth so far. Go on!"

"There ain't much more to tell," answered the man, growing uneasy again. "I clothed him and took him out for a feed, and then we came back to my room for a talk. He soon found out I had a little money, and was eager to have me start the gambling-house again. He boasted how skillful he'd got to be at cards, and that led to us playing a game or two. You know what a hold the cursed things have on me. So did he. Luck was with him from the first, or else he cheated so cunningly that the devil himself couldn't have caught him at it, but he very soon broke my little pile and cleaned me out. Cleaned me out he did!" repeated the gambler, excitedly, wiping his brows and speaking more to himself than to his frowning listener. "Left me without a dollar, curse him! When he got the last, I threw him the canvas bag I'd kept them in. 'You'd better have this too,' says I; and he took it with a cool laugh and a sneer, and tied my money into it, and was putting it in his pocket when a thought seized me—mother's ring! That would turn the luck surely. I played him a last game for the little old ring and lost it like all the rest."

He had grown more and more excited as he talked. It seemed as if this recalling of his wrongs had made him oblivious of caution. As he spoke those last words, flinging his hat upon the ground before him with much the same gesture probably as when he flung his last dollar down before Black Ned, he raised his voice so high that Jane put up a warning hand, and said quickly and softly:

“Hush! Not so loud. Speak lower. But go on: he took the ring?”

“Ay, did he, curse him! and got up to go, knowing that he was leaving me without a dollar. There was no talk of partnership now, mind you, now when he’d ruined me. I asked him to give me back the ring at least,” he added, more quickly. “Mother’s ring—a worthless thing in itself, but it troubled me to miss it from my finger. He refused. He jeered at me for my bad play, as he tied my money into the canvas bag and started to leave me. He’d been drinking,” he went on after another pause, “so had I; and my blood was hot against him. Was I going to let him carry that money off and leave me penniless? No! So I followed him.”

He stopped again, wiping his brow, on which a cold sweat of some horrible excitement gathered, and glanced around him.

Jane spoke, cautiously and low: “You took the money back. There was no money found upon the corpse—upon”—she corrected herself, keeping close watch upon his face the while—“upon the murdered man.”

But the words alarmed him. He was upon his guard again in an instant.

“I don’t know anything about any murdered man,” he said, sullenly; “I’ve told you that before. We were two drunken men, Ned and I, as we went out into the street—a quiet side-street up-town it was, and, the hour about two in the morning.” (Jane made a mental comment here: “All those side-streets up-town terminated at the river.”)

“ We went out quarreling, and we quarreled as we walked along, I asking him for the ring at least, and he jeering at me. Then very soon we went from words to blows, and—and—” He came to a dead pause here, looking into those cold, clear blue eyes that held his own so unflinchingly. Then he looked away and around, and burst into a short, hard laugh. “ We went from words to blows,” he went on, recklessly, “ as we’d often done before, and because I was the strongest and Ned was the drunkest, the best of the fight was mine. I gave him a good beating and took my money back, and came away, leaving him where I’d knocked him down, lying quiet enough. That was the last I saw of him. Two or three days later I heard about his being picked out of the river. I knew it must be him by the name and the ring, but I felt no call to bother about it. Besides, I waited to hear if the report of Roy Craven’s death would call forth any sign from you. You know what success I had. When I heard that his wife had claimed him, I was afraid for awhile to make inquiries as to where you lived, for fear of attracting attention. I got away from New York, and kept away for over a year, to let inquiry blow over. Ned being dead and decently buried, it was best to let him rest, you know; I ain’t anxious to claim relationship. So now you know all about it, Jane, and I hope you’re satisfied. I’ve got a trifle of money still left, and I’m willing to use it for your interest and the girl’s, and help you both to fortune. We can go to San Francisco, take another name, leave all the past behind us. Come, will you do it? Don’t sit there silent, staring at me as if you saw a ghost! What d’ye say?”

Jane rose up, pale and stern, confronting him.

“ It would be no wonder if I did see a ghost, indeed,” she said, solemnly—“ the ghost of this man whom you murdered!”



## CHAPTER XII.

## JANE CRAVEN'S ANSWER.

“YES, whom you murdered!” Jane went on, excitedly. “Don’t imagine that your lies deceive me, sir. The man had been stabbed in the side and gashed in the throat, and do I not know of old how ready with the knife you always were, and how you always carried one? You put the corpse into the river after you had beaten the face so brutally that identification was almost impossible. Oh, you villain! Not that I care,” she added, suddenly recollecting herself and controlling her natural horror. “Neither Black Ned nor Roy Craven was anything to me but enemies whom I am glad to be rid of. But, as the murderer is even a greater villain than the murdered, the sight of you is loathsome to me. Go!” She stretched out her hand with a stern dismissal. “For the sake of the past and old ties I am silent and you are safe; but go, and never let me see your evil face again!”

But the man she had to deal with was not to be so easily cowed. He first stared at her in surprise, then scowled in indignation, then laughed out aloud in bitter contempt.

“Very fine!” said he. “What d’ye take me for? Go! Not I, indeed, without what I came for. As for you”—with a threatening look—“I doubt you’re too much of a spitfire for a man to live with in peace. I fear you’d tempt me some day to give you what I gave Black Ned—a good beating. Think what you please about what else I gave him, but if you’re wise, hold your tongue. It ain’t healthy to quarrel with me, Jane. My enemies ain’t long-lived. Now, understand one thing, for we’ve talked long enough: I want to see my daughter, Mercy Craven. Where is she?”

Jane looked him calmly in the face and folded her arms.

"I haven't the slightest idea, Black Ned Craven, where your daughter may be," she answered, with the utmost deliberation. "In fact, I assure you that, until you mentioned her this moment, I had never even heard that Ned Craven had a daughter at all."

At that his temper gave way. He came toward her with a savage oath and an uplifted hand; but she, stepping back quickly, thrust a firm hand into her bosom.

"Take care!" was all that she said, and said it quietly, but perhaps her looks gave him a sufficient warning; at any rate, he controlled his sudden passion and let his clinched hand fall harmless to his side.

"What d'ye mean by addressing me as Ned Craven?" he demanded, fiercely. "You know well, you jade, that I am your husband Roy!"

"I know nothing of the kind," answered Jane, throwing aside her cool, indifferent air, though she still retained her self-possession, and spoke with passionate intensity. "On the contrary, I now distinctly recognize you as Ned. My husband is dead and buried. Identified by me, his wife, and wearing his own clothes marked with his name, as well as a ring which he regarded as an amulet, and was never known to part from. Roy Craven is dead, I tell you. Disprove it"—she paused and regarded him for a moment with a smile of mingled mockery and triumph—"disprove it if you can!"

As for him, it would be impossible to describe the mingled emotions with which he watched and heard her, realizing all the time the situation in which he stood, and his own actual powerlessness.

"You know better! you know better!" was all he could say at first, and he groaned with impotent rage at his own helplessness.

Jane's smile changed to an open laugh of triumph.

"No matter what I know, or what we know," said she, "that is what I say and shall maintain before all the

world. You are Ned Craven, and my husband Roy is dead. More than that"—she cast a glance around her, speaking with a proud, elated manner, though still in the same cautious tone—"by your own account you were the last in Roy Craven's company. By your own account you were drinking and gambling together and had quarreled. By your own confession a struggle took place, after midnight, in one of those quiet side-streets that lead down to the river's edge. You are both gypsies, and you both carry knives. Roy Craven is never seen alive again, but some days afterward is taken out of the river stabbed to death. No money is found upon the corpse, although some people must have known that he had money; but you have doubtless been seen by many since with his money, in his canvas bag, in your possession. Aha!" as he started, and his pallor increased, "an ugly sort of case to go into court with. Well, Ned Craven, take this warning from me in time, then. The world is wide; choose your road in it, and let it lie as far apart from me and mine as possible. For, as God sees me, if ever you cross my Mercy's path, to cast the stain and shadow of your evil, shameful life on hers, if ever you seek me again, or try to fasten any claim upon me, I, on my part, will cast aside all ties of blood that ever stood between us, and, knowing what I know of you, will denounce you as your cousin's murderer!"

---

## CHAPTER XIII.

### LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

MY story returns to Steve Raymond and his mother, whom it left, somewhat unceremoniously, pursuing their way homeward upon the night of Mercy Craven's arrival in New York. The shrewd little woman had sense enough to let the conversation drop when Steve showed an inclination to lapse into somewhat moody silence, and, fully

aware that she had come out of the argument with flying colors, and silenced, if not convinced, her son, forbore to show any triumph over his discomfiture. All the same, she was secretly joyful with a sense of Mercy's defeat, and congratulated herself upon having so quickly detected, and probably routed, a possibly dangerous enemy.

"She would have won him from Ada if I hadn't spoken in time," she thought. "But now—well, I flatter myself I've put a spoke into that wheel. We shall see what fruit my plain-speaking bears to-morrow."

It bore the very fruit she most desired. Ada came, according to promise, looking all the prettier for a slight shade of sadness that dimmed the usual rosy brightness of her beauty, and gave her (now that his mother had given him an unmistakable key to its cause) an additional charm of interest in Steve's eyes. She was no longer merely the pretty girl with whom he had idly flirted and amused himself. He saw in her the woman whose serious affections he had too lightly won, and whose happiness his fickleness would compromise. "Bound to her in honor," he said to himself, repeating his mother's words, and could not help feeling a thrill of natural masculine vanity and pleasure as he realized what a very sweet and charming creature she was to be bound to, after all.

So amiable, too. He had known her all his life, and when had he heard a bitter word from those sweet lips, or seen the placid fairness of her face disfigured by the blackness of a frown? A little pouting—which was rather becoming than otherwise—and a few bright tears; these gave sufficient expression to the slight ruffling of a temper which was gentle almost to a fault.

And she loved him. What wonder that his heart thrilled with pride? And she would grieve, "perhaps to death," whispered vanity, if he forsook her for another. What wonder if his heart grew soft with pity at that thought, or if, being inexperienced and young, and wholly ignorant of

his own heart-mysteries, he quite mistook that tender pity for another feeling, and believed, for the present moment, that he loved?

And that present moment was quite long enough to see some serious mischief done. Under the influence of the feelings to which Mrs. Raymond's "plain speaking" had given rise, his manner to Ada became tender, his eyes held a new expression, his voice took a softer tone; under the influence of this change in him, the girl who loved him brightened like a flower that feels the reviving power of sun and rain. The jealous doubts and fears that had so pained her fled away; she listened to him like one enthralled, looked up adoringly into his eyes, and cast down her own with smiles and blushes. What wonder that Mrs. Raymond, having discreetly left them alone, the temptation to ask, "Do you love me, Ada?" grew too strong to be resisted, or that, when the timidly whispered, answering question came, "Ah, Steve! but do you love *me*?" it won the answer that it would have won from ninety-nine out of every hundred men of his age and circumstances: "Yes, I do love you dearly! My Ada! My little wife!"

And, truly, the momentous words once spoken, the satisfaction of this hitherto rather unwilling and doubting lover seemed scarcely second to Ada's own. She was so pretty, so brightly radiant with love and happiness, and yet so charmingly modest and shy, that he could not admire her sufficiently. There was a decided pleasure in clasping her in his arms, unrebuked, and kissing the sweet red lips, that coyly half returned and half shrunk from the pressure.

To think that this lovely, loving, lovable creature was his own forever! What man would not have been glad and proud? and Steve was glad and proud accordingly; satisfied with her, satisfied with himself, half intoxicated with gratified vanity and natural pleasure in his sweet prize. In short, his experience was that of a man who,



being strongly attracted by two different women, but seriously loving neither, finds himself yielding wholly to the fascinations of the one, while the other is out of the way, and honestly thinks (if he pauses to think at all) that this present one is the one that charms him, and that his temporary intoxication of the senses and glamour of the mind is, what it is not, and can not possibly be, the strongest, highest, deepest, noblest, saddest of all human experiences, namely, the master passion—love.

Steve's love was only a pretty counterfeit, but this neither he nor Ada knew. It had not the ring of the genuine metal, and would not stand wear and tear. But how should he or Ada suspect this, when, like a great many other pretty things in this age of shams, it looked so exactly like the real thing upon the surface that only an expert could possibly have detected the fraud?

Ada and Steve were not experts in love, but simple novices, and so the "brummagem gilt" passed muster with them for true gold; and they feasted their eyes and hearts upon beautiful Dead Sea fruit, all unsuspecting that when they should need to turn to it for real nourishment, it would fill their longing mouths with bitter dust and ashes, being worthless and rotten at the core.

Mrs. Raymond's happiness, too, weighed for a great deal with Steve. That dear "little mother" who had so devoted her life and hopes to him, it was something to make her so glad. And how glad she was, to be sure! It was not only that she believed her son's happiness secured by a marriage with Ada, but the thought of Mercy loomed up before her mental vision, fraught with mysterious evils and fears—a dangerous sunken rock, on which Steve's bark of life might have suffered shipwreck and gone down, had not her own foresight and Ada's charms brought it to this safe matrimonial anchorage.

"My darling!" she said, rapturously, as she kissed the blushing girl. "My heart's own chosen longed-for daugh-

ter!" and then as she placed her in Steve's outstretched arms, she kissed his lips and whispered: "You have well repaid me for a life's devotion; this pays for all!"

So Steve felt like a hero, and Ada was a lovely and happy *fiancée*, and Mrs. Raymond glowed with joy and triumph. And not one of them gave a thought to or took any account of Mercy. And yet she was a woman whose lure few men would even have tried to resist, and she had looked with favor on this man, and whispered to herself:

"I will try to win him!"

But no one knew of that. Steve had forgotten her; poor Steve! it was the first forgetfulness and the last! Ada feared her no longer. Was not Steve her own betrothed now? Who could come between them? Not one of them thought of Mercy Craven, except the little mother (with that one passing fancy about sunken rocks and shipwrecked lives), and she only thought of her as of a danger escaped and an enemy routed, and triumphed blissfully in the belief that she had defeated her.

---

## CHAPTER XIV.

### AWAKENING.

THESE three mortals dwelt in their fool's paradise all that day, believing it to be a true Eden as all mortals will. They really were blissfully happy. There were so many things to think and talk and plan about, all relating to the one pleasant topic—the marriage that was soon to be. It could not be too soon, Mrs. Raymond declared; and Steve seconded the opinion with so much warmth that it did quite as well as if he had originated it; and pretty Ada—though she uttered not a word—came in as a warm and willing third, with her beautiful blushes and happy smiles and lovelit eyes. Why not be married in the coming spring? Mrs. Raymond suggested. But Ada timidly

thought, with charming visions of a trousseau arising before her mind, that she really could not be ready quite so soon as that, the winter being now so nearly over. Wouldn't the summer do? she asked, with shamed red cheeks that Steve kissed immediately by way of answer. And so it was definitely settled that the early summer should see them made man and wife, so that they could go away from town to some secluded spot together.

Happy hours fly fast, they say, but this day, even when measured by commonplace ordinary time, was not a long one. Ada had some domestic business which demanded her presence home at an early hour—as early as seven, in fact. (It may be told here that she was an orphan as well as an heiress, and dwelt under the care and chaperonage of a widowed aunt, who loved her dearly enough to have spoiled her thoroughly, if the sweet, amiable, child-like nature had been at all easy to spoil.) And who but Steve should take her home, of course, and spend one hour in “converse sweet” when he got her there, and almost another hour in bidding her good-bye; so that it was very nearly nine o'clock when he found himself alone and in the street again.

Alone, almost for the first time that day. A sudden sense of waking from a dream came over him—a sudden arousing to actual reality—a feeling of sobering down after the state of excitement and elation in which he had passed the day. A keen sense of his own individuality struck him strangely, as if he had been masquerading in some other man's character, and had quite suddenly resumed and recollected his own. Next he began to realize, soberly, what he had done—not with regret—by no means. Astonishment, bewilderment was what overpowered him, as if he had been startled out of sleep by voices crying to him, “This is Steve Raymond—Steve Raymond, going to be married almost directly!” and really the information stunned him.

Presently something like misgivings began to mingle with his surprise—a doubt, a fear, a question.

“Have I been too hasty?” he asked himself. “Ada is a sweet creature, and I love her; but wouldn’t it have been better to take a little more time? To marry so soon!” Suddenly he quickened his pace. “I’ll take a good long walk,” thought he, “and think it over.”

He was at this moment on Broadway, not far from Twenty-third Street. The night being fine, and the weather having somewhat moderated during the past twenty-four hours, the brilliant thoroughfare was gay with groups of people hurrying merrily along, and musical with sleigh-bells and happy laughter.

“There’s too much noise for serious thought here,” was Steve’s conclusion; “I’ll take a turn or two in the quiet park.”

So he started to cross the road to get to it; but he had to wait a moment on the curb while a pair of splendid sleighs, almost abreast, and with their gayly caparisoned horses striving hard to get the lead, went dashing past so rapidly that they made him catch his breath and start back as from a sudden danger.

“By Jove!” said he, “they’re going the pace in earnest. If any one slipped and fell down in their road now there wouldn’t be much chance of saving them, as I last night saved Mercy—Mercy!”—the very mention of her name gave him a curious shock and thrill that startled him—“I had forgotten her,” he muttered, as her brilliant dark face and splendid eyes seemed almost to rise before him, filling his heart with a swift and strange uneasiness—“beautiful, charming creature that she is, and all day long I have forgotten her!”

It was an offense against her beauty and her power, which he was doomed to expiate in many a weary, bitter night and day of vain and sorrowful remembering. It was an offense of only a few hours’ duration, but its expia-

tion lasted through a life-time, and began at once; for scarcely had he gained the sidewalk by the park when a cry arrested his steps—a low, sweet little cry of gladness in a woman's voice—a sweet, musical voice that thrilled his soul; and then he heard his own name spoken joyfully.

“Steve! It is Cousin Steve!” and lo! beautiful Mercy Craven was standing there beside him, her dark eyes, full of a soft and tender light, raised to his own, while her two hands clasped on his arm clung to him joyfully.

---

## CHAPTER XV.

### “THE OTHER WOMAN.”

“DON'T you recognize me?” she asked him with something of surprise in her look and tone, “or is it that you are not glad to see me?”

And a shadow of reproach stole into her eyes, and her hands loosened their hold, and would have fallen from his arm had not Steve caught and held them there.

“Recognize you!” he cried, enthusiastically. “Who that had once seen you could be so blind? And as for being glad to see you!” he drew one of the little hands close within his arm in very expressive fashion. “Dear cousin!” (Oh, that convenient title of “cousin,” how much it serves at once to express and hide!). “But you startled me so!” pursued Steve, his spirits rising in her presence under the influence of a fascination which he felt but did not either understand or realize. “I was thinking of you, and of our last night's adventure, when here you suddenly appear before me like a—” he broke off with his own merry laugh, which already had grown sweet and pleasant to her ears. “I was going to say ‘like a ghost,’ ” said he, with most candid admiration looking out of his handsome eyes, “but I don't suppose that anything out of the flesh was ever half so beautiful as you are.”

Rather a promising speech for Ada's betrothed husband,



was it not? But he was like the man between two loves, and this time the other woman had her chance, and the first was, for the time being, forgotten. Mercy found no fault with his broad compliment; she laughed merrily, looking coquettishly up into his eyes the while.

“You are a flatterer!” she said, gayly. “But I am glad to see you all the same. It seems fated that you should come to my rescue, and I am in trouble again. Yes,” nodding merrily to the question in his eyes, “I came out to mail a letter about an hour ago and took the wrong turn, I suppose, for I am lost!” She laughed out gayly at the idea. “Lost to-night, like a great big baby, and last night nearly run over, like an adventurous child that tries to cross the street alone, without its proper guardians beside it! I have reason to be glad of this meeting, you see, for really until you came there was nothing to laugh at in being alone here at night. But you will show me the right road again. And of course,” she added, clinging a little more closely to his arm, and softening the mischievous expression of her eyes into something dangerously like tenderness, “of course I am very, very glad to see you without that. I should be a most ungrateful creature if I were not. You seem the only real friend I have in this strange place, dear Cousin Steve!”

And again the seeming harmless, useful, mischievous title came into play, and bridged over all safe and prudent distance between these two (so lately strangers), most conveniently and dangerously. “Dear Cousin Steve” drew Mercy’s arm a little further within his own, and held her soft hand so that his own warm and ignorant heart beat close against it. And “Dear Cousin Mercy” made no objection to the pleasant arrangement, and certainly saw no harm in it whatever. As, indeed, neither should I, had Steve been free, instead of standing, as we know he stood, between two loves.

“I don’t want you to be glad to see me just out of grati-

tude," said Steve, making excellent progress for a novice, and really oblivious, for the moment, of any other woman in the world except the one beside him. "I want you to like me for my own sake, as I do you. Do I seem like your only friend in this strange place? Let me remain so, Mercy."

They had turned into the park while speaking and strolled around; but neither was yet sufficiently far gone in love to resist the bitter weather. Moreover, it was after nine o'clock and Mercy grew uneasy.

"You must take me home at once," she said. "Mrs. Lester will wonder at my absence. Come. You see I place myself entirely under your protection, Cousin Steve."

And she raised her beautiful eyes once more with that full glance that so intoxicated him. It thrilled him now so that he forgot prudence and caught her hand up to his lips, leaving a passionate kiss upon it.

"I wish you were under my protection in earnest and for life," he cried, really half unconscious what he said.

But the words and the kiss had startled her. This was going so much further than she had counted on that it threw her off her guard of prudence. She started and caught her breath and blushed rosy red.

"Oh!" she cried, and a whole volume of expression was in that single word and the look that accompanied it. And then, with a natural thrill of triumph, added impulsively: "What would Miss Ada West say to that, I wonder?" and could have bitten her own tongue off the minute afterward; for Steve started and let go her hand and turned suddenly quiet and grave—so quiet that they were close to Seventeenth Street before another word passed between them, for he was saying to himself, "What would Ada say?" and recalling the obligations which he had taken upon himself, and doubting, doubting more strongly than ever, lest he had taken them too hastily.

“If it had been Mercy, now,” he thought, with a glance at the beautiful face, clouded now and slightly drooping, at his side. And he could not help knowing that with Mercy for his promised bride he would have felt that marriage could not come too soon, while with Ada, poor, loving Ada, would it not have been better to take time for consideration? Meantime, if indeed she could have heard these hasty words or read his thoughts, “What would Ada say?”

And Mercy was lamenting, ay, and cursing—it is not too strong a word—cursing her own foolish tongue, which had recalled to him the memory of a rival.

“He is engaged to her, I do believe,” was her mental comment on his changed manner, “and I have actually played the advocate for her, reminding him of her existence and her claims. Can she love him as I could love—that pale, pretty, milk-and-water girl—she who has home, wealth, friends, while I have nothing? What if I take him from her? She will marry some one else and be just as happy; but I never cared and never shall care for any one as I could care for Steve; and I could make him love me, I know that. Oh, why did I speak of her?”

By this time they had come to Seventeenth Street, and Mercy, recognizing the locality, stopped short and spoke in a saddened tone to her companion.

“I would rather go in alone,” she said; “and besides, I may have interrupted your walk, and have certainly given you trouble enough. Thanks and good-night.” She held out her hand and let her eyes look into his slowly and wistfully. “Good-night”—there was a minute’s hesitation here, and then, low and sadly—“good-night, Cousin Steve.”

That touched him strangely. How lonely and friendless she was, and how beautiful! He took the offered hand and held it gently.

"I hope you are not angry for that kiss," he said, trying to smile.

She looked at him steadily and reproachfully.

"You know better," she said, with a candor that somehow shamed him. Then, with a sudden air of indifference: "We are cousins, you know; even my lover could scarcely be angry that my cousin should kiss my hand, so long as I keep my lips for him—I mean for my lover."

It was a cunning speech. It implied a rival in his way as well as one in hers, and fired his latent jealousy. He flushed and laughed uneasily.

"You *have* a lover, then?" said he.

She looked full at him. A proud smile of conscious power broke over her face; she drew herself up to her full height and stood, in the white light of the wintery moon, before him, tall and beautiful.

"Why, Cousin Steve, what do you think probable?" said she, simply. But her whole figure seemed to add, plainly: "Am I a woman to be passed by and go unloved or unwedded?"

At that sight of her, at her word and smile, above all, at the thought of a rival, Steve lost his head once more, and this time completely.

"I think that *I* am your lover!" he cried, passionately. "At any rate, I know that I love you, Mercy, ay, as I shall love no other!" He drew her closer by the hand which he still held. It was night, and his arm stole round her waist. "Come aside a little," he said, and they passed into the shadows of the houses. Then suddenly he caught her in his arms. "Oh, my beautiful darling, give your lips to me!" he cried—"to none but me, Mercy! I had rather the horses had trampled you to death last night than see you in another man's arms! For I love you! I love you! I love you!" and at every passionate pause he kissed her lips. "I love you, Mercy!"

But she spoke no single word. Only her proud head,

laid low upon his breast, answered him, and her soft arms clinging closely round his neck.

Perhaps, however, a lover could scarcely have desired a better answer, and Steve had declared himself her lover; Steve, who only that some afternoon had betrothed himself to Ada; Steve who was thus forsworn, and who, in the first mad intoxication of a real passion, had even forgotten that he was forsworn—for Mercy's sake.

---

## CHAPTER XVI.

### MERCY'S HAPPY HOUR.

MERCY went home like one who walks in a blissful dream. The frosty air seemed changed to a haze of happiness that intoxicated her like wine as she breathed it in, and her swift footsteps—swift because, let one be ever so happy and triumphant, half past ten o'clock is not quite the hour for a young girl to be out in the street alone, and it was more than probable that Mrs. Lester would require some explanation, and Mercy had not the slightest intention of revealing who her escort had really been; therefore she hurried rapidly along Seventeenth Street, and her swift footsteps were light and buoyant as if they trod the air.

Steve had kept her talking for nearly an hour after that mad declaration of his, saying nothing to the point (*i. e.*, nothing about matrimony) certainly, as Mercy could not but acknowledge, but full of love and tenderness, and evidently almost unable to make up his mind to let her leave him at all, so that it was long after ten o'clock when she reached the house, looking so brilliantly handsome, for her lips and cheeks were aglow with her lover's kisses, and her eyes were like shining stars, that Polly Lester, coming forward to meet her, all prepared to scold, actually forgot her purpose, and stood looking at her in silence for awhile, positively startled at her beauty.

“Why, Mercy, it's almost eleven o'clock!” Mrs. Lester

--



said at last, exaggerating her sister woman's offenses, as is the custom of the sex. "Where on earth have you been? And what makes your face so red and your eyes so bright? You look quite excited!"

Mercy might have answered truthfully enough that the probable reason for her looking excited was that she really was so. But she did nothing of the sort. On the contrary, she put her two hands to her crimson, tell-tale cheeks and cast down her bright and happy eyes.

"It's the wind and the frosty air, I think, that makes my face burn so, Cousin Polly," she said, innocently, and added, in her secret soul: "You will be *sister* Polly one of these days, though you little suspect it; and I really feel to like you to-night for your brother's sake." Then she went on with a guileless air that quite satisfied Polly. "I took the wrong turning and lost my way. That's how I am so late. I got into a wide street—Broadway it was called—and, not liking to accost any one so late, I wandered along quite a distance. The sleighs were so pretty and merry-looking, too, I'm afraid I spent some time in watching them. At last I found that I must have a guide, so I spoke to a young fellow who was passing, and he very kindly brought me to the end of the street. I think," she added, naively, "that I have rather enjoyed my adventure on the whole, now that I am safely housed again."

Polly Lester, though rather scandalized, was mollified by this very candid explanation. She shook her head a little, but not severely.

"Country ways won't do for New York, my dear," said she, assuming an air of matronly dignity and immensely superior age. "You are not quite homely enough to go running about the streets alone, you know. Your mother will hold us responsible for your safety, of course. Don't go out so late alone again, I beg of you."

There was a certain air of patronage in this speech

which Mercy, proud of temper and quick of tongue, detected instantly, and at another time would have resented too.

But she was too happy and secretly triumphant now to resent anything. She only laughed joyously and answered:

“You are quite right, of course, cousin. But for all that,” she added, with secret satisfaction, “if I get into no worse trouble or mischief than I have to-night, I shall do well enough.”

An opinion from which Polly would have differed widely if she could have known all—an opinion which Mercy herself, in after days saw sorrowful cause to qualify.

But what have sorrowful after days to do with the glad present, especially when one is young, and beautiful, and triumphant with a sense of one’s power?

In her present hour of happiness and success Mercy would have laughed scornfully at the wisest seer who should have foretold to her sorrow and defeat in store.

She bade Mr. and Mrs. Lester good-night, and went away to her own room still bright and buoyant with the same glamour of love and joy that she had brought into the house with her.

Mr. and Mrs. Lester were sensible that their handsome parlor grew duller after she had closed its door behind her, as if she had somehow taken away from it a portion of warmth and light.

“A happy, joyous disposition, and so pretty!” said Richard Lester to his wife. “There’s no such thing as fretting or growling about her; she seems quite at home here already.”

And in his heart he thought:

“What a wife she’ll make for somebody!”

But this opinion he was far too discreet to express aloud, knowing instinctively that Polly did not share his admiration.

Mercy, whose beauty had impressed him from the first, had completely won him by the admirable discretion with which she had fulfilled her mother's trust about the letters.

Handing the little package to him the first time she found him alone, and doing so with such an air of smiling simplicity, as permitted him to flatter himself that she knew nothing of its contents, and at least assured him that even if she did know, she was not the girl to presume upon her information.

"I think she seems rather heartless," was Polly's discouraging reply. "Not one regret for home or for her mother's company; I couldn't part from my mother so coolly," she continued, quite ignoring the probable difference between cold, hard, stern Jane Craven and the "little mother," whose whole life had been toward her twin children one long "act of love." "Let her village home have been ever so dull, one would think she would feel the change, especially as she hasn't come to the warmest of welcomes here. But I suppose she is one of those cold-hearted, ambitious women who care for nothing but themselves. I'm sure she looks it!" spitefully, for Mercy's looks were bound to give offense to her own sex. "I forgot to tell her there was a letter for her upstairs, but I dare say it doesn't matter. It came while she was out, and I sent it up to her room supposing that she had returned. I guess by the postmark it's from her mother. It lies on her toilet-table near the looking-glass, so she'll be sure to see it" (still more spitefully). "Or if she doesn't it won't much matter, I fancy. She's not pining for news of mother or home, as you very truly say, my dear; she'll wait with great equanimity for news of them, no doubt, until the morning!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

## H O P E S   A N D   F E A R S .

MERCY did not wait quite so long, however; but neither did she discover the letter immediately, though it must be confessed that she went straight to her looking-glass the moment she entered the room, and not from a feeling of vanity—though it would have been a hard matter to make Polly Lester believe that.

The girl was too well used to her own beauty to spend much time over its contemplation, and her hasty rush to the mirror arose from a real anxiety to see for herself how much her glowing eyes and tell-tale cheeks might have revealed to Polly. The crimson deepened as she gazed, and she covered her face with her hands again, shamed, before her own bright eyes, at the rapture of love and joy that shone in them.

“If Polly had ever felt as I feel, she would know,” she murmured, guiltily. “My eyes betray me; I never saw that strange, soft light in them before, and I’ve seen them and speculated on their beauty’s worth at their best and brightest. It is the ‘love-light,’ I suppose, that poets talk about, and that I have so often mocked at—ah, but I mock no longer; I have learned that I, too, can love. Oh, but you are beautiful with that new light in you!” she went on, softly, and gayly apostrophizing her own splendid dark orbs, or, rather, their reflection in the glass; “and oh, but it is a sweet light and a happy light—a light that may well be the warmth and sunshine of a woman’s life; and God is good to me at last—to me, whose life has been so sad and lonely, when He lets my cold and hard heart feel, and my eyes show it!—they mustn’t show it quite so plainly, though, to any one but Steve, dear, dear Steve, or we shall not long keep our secret, for if I should see that

light after to-night in another woman's eyes, I should just say to myself, 'Hum! you have been looking at the man you love, my dear.' The man I love!—oh, how strange the sweet words sound!—the man I love!"

She sat down now on a chair that happened to stand just before the mirror, and, never noticing the letter at all, went on meditating softly, and smiling the sweetest, happiest smile meanwhile that ever yet had brightened her beautiful face.

"It is so strange to think that, two days ago, we did not know each other," she mused, "and now!—there *is* such a thing as love at first sight, then, after all! He cares more for me in these few hours than for that pretty pink-and-white girl who has, no doubt, been trying to win him all her life long. She never shall have him now! Are they engaged, I wonder? Strange that he never mentioned marriage to me to-night—no, not once!"

The smile died away and a frown replaced it at that reflection; but not for long—not for long enough to banish the love-light from her eyes. She was too happy and too confident of her own power to look on the dark side yet awhile.

"The question of marriage is understood, of course," she reassured herself. "Of course he means to marry me; he is too honest and too young to have any less honorable thought; and, if there has been any nonsense with this Ada West—as I fear, I fear!—why, it will have to be got over. Certainly his family will oppose it; but I think he will defy his family for my sake, let Ada be once out of the way. As for her, in a choice between her happiness and my own, I naturally choose my own. Who would not? Who, above all—whose life had known so little happiness as mine has? Let her look to herself. We are pitted against each other—we two women—and the one who can win him must take him. He is mine so far. Yes, in spite of your long acquaintance and Mrs. Ray-



mond's favor—in spite of flirtation, and some sort of tacit engagement, perhaps—in spite of your pretty face and good family, and your fortune—in spite of all these he forgot you for me to-night, and he loves me best—and so he is mine so far!”

The smile had died and the love-light had faded when Ada came into these musings, and the old, hard, resolute look, so familiar in Mercy Craven's face, darkened its beauty once more. But she cast the shadow off and brightened again at that thought—“He loves me best!”

“After all,” she went on reasoning—“after all, what does the opposition of his family amount to, and upon what will it be founded? They can have no objection to me personally, unless my poverty; and what does that matter, really and practically, when he is rich enough for both? It might be a serious obstacle, indeed, if we both were without fortune; mother would have something to say about it then, and I could not ignore her wishes as I shall ignore the Raymond family. She would make me give him up! Would she?” The hard look came into her face again. “Could she? Is this new, strange, sweet love that I feel so poor and weak a feeling that any one could make me give up my dear lover? No, no, no! I might choose to do so of my own hard, selfish will, preferring riches to his love; but no mortal living, except myself, shall be strong enough to part us! Except myself! If I should do it it would be like self-murder, for all the years of my life have not been worth the last hour of it in which I have loved and been loved again. My miserable, lonely, loveless, drudging life—so hard, so monotonous, so poor! Ah, the curse of poverty! Could even Steve's love content me if we were poor—if I must dress my beauty in cotton gowns, and hide it in poky rooms where none would see me and make my husband proud by telling him how fair his wife was? How I hate that very word—Poverty!”

Her beautiful eyes had clouded with these thoughts, and

her face wore its worst and hardest expression. Suddenly a happier fancy banished them and brought the brightness back.

“How silly I am, torturing myself with such idle fancies! Steve is rich, of course. Did not my mother say, ‘The younger brother is well off, and you will do well if you can marry him?’ Ah! I would rather marry Steve, with a moderate fortune, than any other, though he were the richest of men.”

She laughed and covered her face a moment.

“Who would have thought that I should ever feel like that?” she sighed, softly. “I blush for myself!”

Then she took up again the thread of her calculations.

“So, my mother’s approval being certain, what else need I care for? My birth is as good as the Raymonds’, at least”—with a sudden pang of recollection—“at least, for aught they know, or ever shall know, please God. I am not going to have my life spoiled because my father was a scoundrel and my mother a fool for loving him. Poor mother!” With a sudden softening: “Did she feel toward him as I feel, I wonder? Well might the bitterness of her disappointment turn her hard and cold! If I were to prove Steve less dear and good and true than I believe him, I would never trust man, woman, or child again!”

With that she arose and stood before the glass, and began to take down the heavy masses of her beautiful dark hair, thinking the while how unlike it was to her mother’s pale, bright tresses, and reflecting, with something like uneasiness, that her raven locks and handsome eyes were inherited from her disreputable gypsy father.

“I am glad that he is dead,” she murmured through stern, set lips. “It seems hard to say, and I used to fancy that I could have loved him, but, knowing all that I know now, I am glad he is dead. You”—with a nod to her eyes and hair in the glass—“you are the only good things

that he ever gave me, and, had he lived, God knows what evil he might have wrought for me, especially now, with Steve. So, thanking him dutifully for my black eyes and hair," she reached down her hand to the table for her brush, "I am very glad indeed that he is dead."

And with that she uttered a sharp little exclamation and sat down, and quite forgot both eyes and hair, for her hand, feeling vaguely for the comb and brush, had found her mother's letter.

---

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE CLOUD THAT PRESAGED THE STORM.

"How strange that Mrs. Lester did not tell me this was here!" was Mercy's first thought, quickly followed by an angry one. "She will treat me like a servant in the house as far as she dares; but Steve will change all that by and by, Madame Polly!" Then, as she broke open the envelope, which was sealed: "And what can mother have had to say that needs such precaution and such haste? for my letter to her is but just posted; she has not waited for that at all! Strange! There's not much news stirring in our village usually, either."

And with that she began to read, and, as she read, her eyes grew blacker, her brows contracted, her face grew paler and more pale, until the paper on which the words that so startled her were written was scarcely whiter than her lips.

This was Jane Craven's letter:

"MY DEAR MERCY,—I am ill—really too ill to write, but I think it my duty to let not a moment go by without warning you of a danger. This will reach you in time to put you on your guard against an enemy.

"Returning from seeing you off this morning, I found a person waiting for me in our cottage garden—a man.

The last man in the world whom I could have wished to see. A relative—a cousin of your dead father.

“ His sudden appearance gave me a turn that I have not yet got over. Therefore I shall write as briefly as possible. He greatly resembles your dead father in appearance—a tall, dark, powerful-looking fellow, black-eyed and haired, and with skin as brown as an Indian’s. Remember this. You may see him, and this description will put you on your guard.

“ He is a scoundrel of the worst description, and you must not parley with him for a moment. I have reason to fear that he will try to communicate with you, perhaps foist upon you some claim of relationship—which would ruin your prospects—or extort money from you as a bribe for silence. Nay, so impudently daring is he that he may go further, and presuming upon a strong family likeness, represent to you that he is your father himself.

“ In such case you will remember that your father is certainly dead. That I, his widow, saw, identified, and buried his body.

“ But your wisest and only really safe course will be to refuse to communicate with the man at all. If he persists or annoys you, threaten to give him into custody, and call an officer at once. He will not stay to be taken, never fear. He dare not. I told you that the body which I identified was that of a murdered man. I suspect this villain to be the murderer.

“ At the same time I beg of you to remember that justice and vengeance, and many other fine words, are not for us to meddle with. My young daughter, standing on the very threshold of a prosperous career, is of infinitely more importance than a dead man in his grave, though he were ten times her father! Let the dead rest. Any scandal that drags that man’s history up before the world to connect it with yours will ruin your matrimonial prospects.

And you have no other prospects, child. Therefore, let the dead rest.

“I will say nothing of my interview with the man I have mentioned, except that after it was over and he had gone I fainted, as I did a year ago when I read in the ‘Herald’ of the drowned man. For some hours afterward I was too much shaken to write; it is evening now; this can not be mailed until the morning; you will receive it some time to-morrow evening in New York.

“He will not have found you so soon. I refused your address, but he knows my family connection, and will be sure to search and inquire. Secretly, though, as he will approach you. Therefore do not go out alone. Or if you do so, and he accosts you, follow the course I have suggested.

“Above all, remember that your father is dead. Listen to nothing, believe nothing, that for one moment says differently to what I declare to you—Roy Craven, your father, is dead!

“Be careful, be prudent, be wise. Watch your chances for a settlement in life, and let no girlish folly balk them. Thank God, the training which I have given you makes that almost impossible. No man, be he lover or father, must interfere with your advantageous marriage. Mine was a marriage of love! Think of that, and reflect what that love came to, and be wise.

“God bless you! Let me know all that interests you, and especially if you see or hear anything of this man.

“Your affectionate mother,

“JANE CRAVEN.”

Mercy read this letter quietly to its last word. At the first few lines, especially at the words “he greatly resembles your dead father,” she had half uttered a startled cry, and glanced nervously around her; but she controlled herself immediately, and, steadying her trembling hands,



in which the letter was shaking, read it to the end; finished, she let it flutter to the floor, and clasped her hands together passionately.

“It is my father,” she whispered, with white lips; “why else does she deny it so strongly, so resolutely, so repeatedly?—it is my wicked, worthless father come back from death and the grave, as it were, to disgrace me and ruin me with Steve!”

“With Steve”—that was her first thought, her first fear; not “to ruin my prospects,” not “to rob me of the hope of marrying wealth,” but simply “to ruin me with Steve!”

“Oh, Jane Craven, Jane Craven! if you could know how useless your training has been to crush mighty nature out of your young daughter’s heart!—if you could see that that warm, womanly heart is like to prove a greater stumbling-block in the prosperous career you have marked out for her than any that Roy Craven can ever place there.”

She picked the letter up and read it carefully once more, her pale face wearing a hard, cold, resolute expression all the time.

“After all, why should I doubt my mother’s word?” she muttered. “I am a wise girl, truly, to make misery for myself. ‘Your father is dead.’ She asserts it very positively; why should I hesitate to believe her? I will not—I do not. Roy Craven, my father, is dead!”

She read the description of the man against whom her mother warned her very carefully.

“I shall remember that description, and recognize him by it if we meet,” she muttered, rising from her chair. “This letter had better be burned, in case of accidents.”

There was a small stove in the room with a bright coal fire burning. Mercy laid her mother’s letter on the coals, and, bending down, eagerly watched it first flash into flame, then change to sparks and ashes, then, at a puff of her breath, float away up the chimney.

“Puff!” she cried, making a scattering motion with her hands as if she wafted the last vestige of it to the winds. “So do I destroy and blow away all claims—even a father’s—that can come between me and Steve.”

Her attitude, bending over the glowing fire, and her excitement of mind and feeling, made her breath come pantingly. She thought it was the warmth of the room that so oppressed her.

“Too hot to sleep in!” she murmured, with an impatient glance around her, and then another at the little silver watch which she despised most cordially. “I’ll have a very different one by and by,” was her passing thought. “Close upon twelve o’clock. I wonder should I disturb any one if I opened the window for awhile. Let’s see; this room is over the dining-room and looks out on the side street, the house being a corner one. I don’t think any one will hear.”

She opened the window softly and leaned out into the frosty air.

It was a brilliant moonlight night, every object in the almost deserted Madison Avenue (which to Mercy was the “side street”) as clearly visible as in the glare of day.

There was a street lamp at the corner, but its pale light faded so in the moon’s bright rays that it seemed, to Mercy’s fancy, to cast a shadow rather than a light.

In that shadow a man was standing, leaning against the base of the lamp. She did not see him at first—not until he, having watched her for some seconds, started from the shadow and made a peculiar sound like “Hist!” apparently to attract her attention. Then she looked at him.

“A tall, powerfully built man.” The description in the letter—the description which had just blazed and flown away up the chimney—might almost have been thought to have taken bodily form when it got outside, and to be standing now before her. Her heart gave a great bound,

and then was calm again, for her keen eyes had seen a police officer approaching on the other side of the street.

The man, occupied in watching her, did not see him.

"Hist!" he whispered again. "Hist! Mercy Craven!"

She turned on him with a sudden fury.

"How dare you?" she said, careful to control her voice, though, and then she made a movement to withdraw her head.

"Hark!" he said again, "my name is Craven too. Let me speak to you."

The officer was near at hand. She pointed to him.

"Your name may be what it will," she said, sternly; "if ever you dare to address me again, I shall give you into custody. If you don't go away instantly I will do so now. Here, officer!"

Her call was scarcely loud enough to be heard, but it served to frighten the man. He glanced at the sauntering policeman and turned to go.

"You are your mother's daughter, curse you!" he said, shaking a threatening fist toward the girl. "My curse upon you both!"

He moved away, and Mercy drew in her head and closed the window, and sunk into a chair. She was trembling now, but more from excitement than cold.

"Who is he?" she asked herself. "I should not know him in the daylight; I did not see his face. Was it my father's face?"

A violent shudder shook her. "He cursed me!" she cried, in terror. "Was it a father's curse? Is that the first fruit that my love for Steve brings to me? Can any one thrive under the weight of a father's curse? It is a dreadful thought! But there"—suddenly controlling herself—"why should it trouble me, whose father is so surely dead? Ah, what did I say before that letter came? and have I not far more reason to say it now? I am very, very glad my father is dead!"

She turned to the glass, and smiled sadly at the white face that greeted her.

"Pale as a ghost!" she sighed. "And where has all the pretty love-light gone, and the bright, happy smile? A cloud has driven the brightness out of my sky." She shivered with a sudden fear. "I hope it may not prove to be the cloud that presages a storm," she sighed. "Oh, God! I hope not!"

---

## CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. RAYMOND MEETS "A LION IN THE PATH."

"NOTHING is perfect in this world. Even when you get the thing you most desire, nine chances out of ten it will disappoint you."

Such were Mrs. Raymond's reflections when Steve came home, at nearly midnight, after having escorted Ada home five hours before, and showed himself to be in surely the strangest and most unsatisfactory mood that ever possessed a happy and accepted lover.

The young man was flushed and his eyes were bright as if with some strong excitement, and yet the mother's instinct was quick to detect that the excitement was not altogether pleasurable. His look and tone in answering her first question confirmed this.

"Why, where have you been? I have waited up for you!" she cried, in surprise and disappointment, for she had been longing to have him to herself, and talk his prospects over. "Surely you have not been with Ada all this time? Until midnight! No, that's not possible!"

"Not desirable, either," he answered, sharply, so sharply that she started. "My prospects are good for seeing quite enough of Ada after awhile, without hunting her now by night and day. No, certainly I haven't been with Ada."

The little mother stared at him in hurt surprise.

Never, no, never since his birth, had he given her such a look and tone before. She said not a word, however, but sat quite silent studying him.

It was rather a perplexing study. He flung himself into a chair, took off his boots as if he owed them a separate grudge, glanced at his mother with a conscious air, and then averted his eyes again.

Finally he arose, and saying, sullenly, "I'm sorry I kept you waiting, mother; you had better get to bed," turned to the door as if to leave her.

Now, the little mother was shrewd enough, and by no means ignorant of human nature. Noting the almost scornful bitterness of the tone in which her son had just pronounced Ada's name, she in an instant thought of "the other woman," and suspected her influence here. Still, as he might not have been thinking of Mercy after all, she was too discreet to suggest her to his thoughts by any point-blank mention of her name. So she went after information roundabout.

"Don't go just this minute, dear," she said, coaxingly, careful not to add to his evident irritation by tone or word. "I've been waiting so long to talk to you. Where have you been? To Polly's?"

He had paused, at her request, on the threshold. He was too fond of the little mother to slight any wish of hers. But he started at her question as if it had stung him.

"To Polly's? No, indeed!" And then he laughed unpleasantly. "Did you think I should be in a hurry to advertise my folly? For it *is* folly! Mother, I believe this engagement of marriage is a hasty, foolish step, and both Ada and I shall repent of it."

And then, noticing his mother's pale, shocked face, and sensible that his own heat and seeming fickleness needed some explanation, he went on more quietly:

"I am but young to tie myself down to a wife yet, and, mother dear, I am too poor. Ada has money. What will



the world think? I look like a fortune-hunter. How much better to have left me free to carve out a place in life and a share of fortune, and then let me meet the wife of my choice on equal grounds. I confess to you that I am ashamed and sorry for having made this engagement at all."

Mrs. Raymond breathed a deep sigh of relief. If this was Steve's strongest objection to the proposed union, it might be got over very easily indeed. Much more easily than Mercy Craven could have been got rid of, had she been the "lion in the way." The little mother smiled a well-satisfied smile.

"You foolish boy!" she said, tenderly. "To grieve yourself about nothing at all. Did you suppose I should not think of all this? Have I been such a bad mother to my boy?"

What could he do but take her in his arms and call her—what she truly was—the dearest and best of mothers. Then he began to argue with her.

"But you know, dear, that when Polly's marriage and the question of Polly's dowry came along, you and I agreed between us that whatever money you had saved, to divide between us, should all be Polly's, so that she might go to Dick Lester as a fairly portioned bride. I was not to marry for many a long year, and, as a man, could do something to make my own fortune, with your loving care to aid me. You remember our agreement, mother? It put Polly on a proper footing with her husband and his family, but it left me penniless. I don't regret it, mind. I'm young, with all the world and my life before me. But it ought to put my marriage, for the present, out of the question. If the wife proposed for me were poor, our union would be imprudent; if she be rich, it appears to me contemptible. If I marry Ada I shall be wretched! I implore you, mother, to go to her in the morning, and ask her to keep our rash engagement a secret, at least until

such time as I can see my way to meeting her on something like equal terms. She will consent to this if you ask her. Will you ask her, dear?"

He was pleading earnestly, with his arms around her, and many a coaxing kiss administered between the pleading words.

His whole heart was set upon gaining this concession. Secrecy! Secrecy, at any cost. That Mercy should not hear, should not know.

Secrecy would give him time, and all the world knows that "time works wonders;" he might be able to obtain a release from his engagement in time, perhaps.

Mrs. Raymond never suspected that his present wishes had such a goal in view, and, mother-like, yielded to his earnestness.

"You want the engagement kept secret until your own circumstances are more equal and clear?" she questioned. "Well, I don't mind asking Ada that, as you make such a point of it, and she will consent, I am sure. But, dear, it is most unnecessary. I can place you in a position to marry Ada, and I will. Only wait a few days until James comes home, and you'll see—"

"James!" Steve withdrew himself a little from her embrace as he heard his brother's name, and stood looking at her with a startled and thoughtful face. "James, did you say, mother? Now, what on earth can James have to do with it?"

Mrs. Raymond laughed softly, in her own happy, satisfied little way, and seating herself comfortably in her favorite chair, signed to Steve to follow her example.

"I certainly said James, my dear," said she, complacently. "James, your eldest brother, and the head of our family, as you know he is. As to what he can have to do with your being placed in a proper position to become the husband of Ada, sit down comfortably and I'll tell you all about it."

Stephen, after a moment's silent and evidently startled hesitation, obeyed her, though not literally, for instead of sitting down comfortably, as she suggested, he flung himself at full length upon the hearth-rug before the fire and at his mother's feet.

"This will do, mammy, if it's going to be a long talk," said he, leaning his head against her lap in such a position that she could not see his face.

"Now for it! What about brother James?"

But as I, also, shall have something to say "about brother James," and as brother James is destined to play a rather important part in this simple story, I think the best plan will be to reserve both Mrs. Raymond's remarks and my own for another chapter.

---

## CHAPTER XX.

### ABOUT BROTHER JAMES.

JAMES RAYMOND, who, at only twenty-eight (it has been mentioned that he was rather more than seven years Steve's senior) held the name and position of "Head of the Raymond Family," had not been invested with this dignity in right of primogeniture merely, neither had he attained to it by any special excellence or virtue, or extraordinary gifts of qualities of either mind or body. In fact, he was rather a commonplace young man, with the exception of a certain hardness, dryness, and coldness of nature and temper which enabled him to keep his "nearest and dearest" at a distance from his own personal affairs, and live, even while mixing with the world, and transacting business, almost as closely shut up in his own designs and plans as an oyster is within its shell.

"Close-fisted and close-mouthed," had been the character that his intimates gave him, even when a boy at school, and maturer years, spent in that advanced school, the world, had not changed him.

"A born money-getter," Jane Craven had described him, and perhaps the "close fist" and the silent tongue were natural traits of such a character. A money-maker he was most undoubtedly and emphatically.

Dull at all studies that aimed not at that end, indifferent to all other pursuits, but having the vulture's keenness, when a bargain was to be scented out, and the fox's shrewdness and cunning to aid him in carrying off the prize.

He was not a bold speculator; his methods of attaining wealth were slow but sure, and, beginning as a poor man, he would probably never have been more than a moderately rich one, but he had had the advantage of commencing life with a very fair fortune, and those who knew him best prophesied confidently that at forty he would be a millionaire.

Why not? people would say; he was on the road to it already, and certain to marry wealth, of course.

Money being his only taste, his only ambition, his only passion, who could for one moment doubt that he would marry money, too?

Certainly he himself did not question it. Marriage, to his mind, was simply a matter of business—a life-partnership of the closest kind, in which the interests of the contracting parties ought to be as nearly as possible equal.

He fully intended to marry whenever he should meet with a suitable bride, and "by suitable" he simply and solely meant "a lady possessed of a large fortune;" for the rest she might be young and fair or old and ugly, a model of feminine wisdom, or a semi-idiot; so long as she brought him a large fortune and conducted herself so as to do no discredit to his name, the rest was "all one" to James Raymond.

Asked his opinion on the question of Polly's dowry, he had said coldly that Steve was a fool for giving up his share

of their mother's savings, but that since Stephen was such a fool it was a good thing for Polly, of course.

Had further said that it was his own intention to present his sister with one thousand dollars to buy her wedding clothes, and that he should wish it understood that her expectations from him must end here, as he should never, at any time, do anything further.

In his own soul, though glad enough of Polly's good fortune, in his secret soul he considered Richard Lester a fool for marrying a girl comparatively poor when richer ones were to be had for the asking.

"For what difference can it make in the long run?" he asked himself. "If Dick had a fancy for youth and a pretty face, there are plenty as pretty as our Polly, and with fair fortunes to their backs. And one woman seems as good as another, I think. Allowing some difference of temper, and all that—which you can't find out until you've married them—they're all the same; you've got a wife, and there's an end of it. But the money is a tangible good. If she's a good wife, the money makes your bargain better; if she's a Tartar the money makes amends. Dick Lester marries Polly and takes her fortune whatever it may be, by the way. I shall marry a large fortune and take the woman it belongs to whatever she may be, by the way. That's worldly wisdom. Dick's a fool, and I'm glad of it, for Polly's sake. He'll never be more than comfortably off, while I shall be a millionaire. Well, I'm satisfied!"

Something of these meditations he had imparted to his mother; confidentially, of course, and very much to her gentle indignation.

"It is well that every one is not so worldly wise as yourself, my dear," she had said reproachfully, "or there wouldn't be much chance for true love and domestic happiness. However, I don't believe that you are half so hard as you pretend to be, and if Steve should have a



chance by and by to marry no less prosperously than Polly has done, you won't allow his generosity to his sister to be a stumbling-block in his way."

James caught at the allusion to Steve's possible marriage, but ignored the hint to himself.

"You're thinking of Ada West," said he. "Now isn't that another instance of folly? There's a girl with a very pretty fortune—a very pretty fortune indeed—resolute to give it and herself to a penniless young fellow, who hasn't—thanks to his quixotism about Polly—a dollar in the world! Whereas, I warrant you, if I were to ask her to marry, she wouldn't so much as even look at me!"

Gentle Mrs. Raymond stared at him in great surprise.

"Did you think of asking her to marry you, my dear?" she asked. "Do you care for her?"

James laughed aloud. Not heartily—that was not his way—but quietly, as if much amused.

"No, no, no!" said he. "Don't be afraid, mother; I sha'n't interfere with your favorite. When I said Ada had a pretty fortune, I meant for Steve. You understand?—for Steve. I should want her sum told ten times over. It'll take that to make me saddle myself with a wife, mother, take my word for it!"

He was still laughing good-humoredly. The little mother looked up wistfully into his face.

"I don't believe you, James," said she. "You're a man of business, a man of the world; but you're not so hard as that. I do believe you'll yet meet a woman that you'd give all your money and all the world to win, and then you'll marry for love."

He laughed even more merrily than before at that, but into his laughter had crept a tone of scorn, as if he mocked at the possibility of his loving; and the little mother, hearing him, thought that her own words had been wild and foolish, and never dreamed that they should yet be proved words of true prophecy.

However, he promised her this much, for Steve—that, if the boy should really win Ada's hand, he would receive him into his business as a junior partner. There were conditions—which would be fulfilled partly by the little mother's exertions, and partly, if necessary, by Ada's means, Steve not knowing—and these conditions were undoubtedly profitable to James, or he would never have agreed to them.

These plans—at least, such portions of them as she thought fit—Mrs. Raymond now confided to her son Steve, together with his brother's promise.

"You are already in his employ on a salary," she said, "and when he accepts you as partner what more can any one ask? I will find the necessary money. Your salary, to begin with, will make you independent of your wife, some portion of whose fortune may be invested in the firm, if you think proper. But James will explain it all to you; he writes me that he will be home in about a week. Wait until James comes back."

Steve offered no further opposition to his mother's plan, merely stipulating that she should, first thing on the following morning, go to Ada and bind her to secrecy—at least until James returned.

"She will consent. It will only be for a week," said the little mother, cheerfully; and Steve, sighing heavily, echoed her words:

"Only for a week!"

"And a week is nothing," he said to himself, when alone in his room. "I can't keep it from her. The most this delay will do for me will be to give me a chance of telling her myself. If she'll only wait for me, I'll marry her. I'll break with Ada; but I can't do it brutally and all at once, for she is a sweet, good girl. Poor Ada! But I love Mercy. Oh, my beauty, my darling, I love you! You, and you only, shall be my wife!"

So on, for hours, up and down his room, unable to sleep,

to rest, even to keep still; and at that same time Mercy, chilled by the night air and shuddering at a ruffian's curse, sat pale and sorrowful under the sudden cloud that had scared the brightness from her sky, and prayed fearfully, "God grant it be not the cloud that presages a storm!"

---

## CHAPTER XXI.

### HOW THE STORM BROKE.

JAMES RAYMOND did not return for nearly two weeks, during which time Steve and Mercy carried their love-making on apace, in spite of many difficulties.

Their interviews were stolen and few, but not the less sweet for that, and as yet Steve had not found courage (he called it opportunity) to tell Mercy of his engagement to Ada West.

As for her, so far from making any inquiries on the subject, she carefully avoided it.

"I will never recall her to his thoughts again," she had resolved on that first evening, and she kept her word well, for she loved him.

So the poor girl went on in a fool's paradise, in which the skies were always bright, and in which she forgot that there had ever been a sign of coming storm, until one evening it broke upon her very suddenly.

It was about seven o'clock. The Lesters usually dined at six, and dinner was just over,

Polly and Dick, with their two children, sat chatting softly by the comfortable parlor fire, while Mercy, at a distant window, was arranging the folds of curtains so that they should not injure some choice flowering plants that were Polly's special pride. All at once there was a sound of merry voices in the hall, the door flew open, and in came a laughing group. James Raymond, with the little mother on his arm, and Steve following, with Ada.

Polly sprung to her feet with a cry:

“James! Is it really you?” and embraced her brother warmly.

Dick Lester also gave him a cordial welcome (for this was the head of the family, the man of money, whom they all, perhaps half unconsciously, propitiated); then a chair was brought for him, the two children were displayed to Uncle James.

Ada and Mrs. Raymond got their bonnets off, and with Steve, drew seats into the cosy family circle. No one except Steve had noticed Mercy as they entered; no one else either thought of her or missed her now. But Steve, who was strangely pale and ill at ease amid the general gladness, Steve gave a sigh of relief on finding that she had disappeared.

“Thank God!” he thought. “Anything, so that she may not hear it here and now, before I have time to prepare her, to assure her that it shall not be true. Thank God she has gone!”

For Mrs. Raymond could keep her happy secret no longer, but burst forth joyously:

“And what do you think brings us all here to-night, when James only came home a few hours ago? It was because I had a present for you, Polly, that is too good to keep from you longer. A new sister, my dear. Ada, come here. Don’t blush so, my darling. Here’s your new sister Ada, Polly, who is soon to be Steve’s wife.”

“Steve’s wife!”

Steve started guiltily at the words; it almost seemed to him that a sobbing cry, as well as Polly’s joyful exclamation, had echoed them.

But that must be merely fancy, of course, since, thank Heaven! Mercy had gone away.

A soft storm of questions, answers, kisses, and congratulations followed.

Ada told, blushing, how the engagement of marriage

had been made "weeks ago," but Steve wanted it kept secret until James should return.

"That's why you have seen so little of me lately," said the proud and happy bride-elect. "I felt that I couldn't see you without telling you, Polly; or, even if I didn't tell you, that you or Mercy would be sure to find me out. By the bye, where is Mercy?"

The question was a simple and natural one enough; and yet if the bride-elect could have known how it turned the heart of her betrothed lover against her, she would have paused long ere she uttered it. But which of us really knows anything of another's secret heart? And poor Ada was no wiser than the rest of us.

"Ay, to be sure," said Mrs. Raymond, taking up the cue, "where is Mercy? And how do you get along with her, my dear? Where is she?"

"I don't know, really. She was here a few minutes since," Polly was beginning, when Mercy struck the curtains aside and stepped quietly into their midst.

"Here I am, Cousin Polly," said she, very calm and very pale. "Did you want me?"

Her appearance created the usual sensation. There was this peculiarity about Mercy's beauty that, under whatever aspect you saw it, it always seemed to be the very aspect that suited her style the best.

On that happy evening when she had come in all sparkling and rose-flushed with hope and love, Polly had secretly wondered at her brilliant loveliness; now as she stood quiet and statuesque and pale as marble before them, Polly again secretly decided that she had never realized what true beauty was until now. And Polly's private and unexpressed opinion might have stood for that of the whole party.

But Mercy's pallor was too marked to pass unnoticed. After a few words, introducing her to James, who seemed



quite bewildered and dazed by the new acquaintance, Polly cried:

“But, goodness me, Mercy, how white you are! You look like a corpse, child! What’s the matter?”

Mercy smiled, and put her hands to her white cheeks and softly rubbed them.

“I’m cold,” she said, “that’s all. I stood at the window fixing your plants until I am chilled through. I always go pale when I am cold, cousin. Hadn’t I better take the little ones up to their nurse?” she added, quietly; “they look sleepy.”

All this time she had not once glanced at Steve, nor he at her. A smile and bow she had given to Mrs. Raymond and Ada—appearing not to see the latter’s proffered hand—and a kind word and a frank hand-clasp to James, but not one word to Steve, who sat silent and with downcast eyes. As she turned to take the children from the room, James suddenly spoke to her earnestly:

“You will come back again? Miss—I mean Cousin Mercy—you will return?”

Then she suddenly flushed and smiled, looking more beautiful than ever. At the same moment, if any one had looked at Steve, they would have seen him cast upon his eldest brother a glance of vehement hatred.

“Certainly I will return,” said Mercy, gayly. “I should be sorry to leave your company, Cousin James, in the first minute of making your acquaintance. I will return directly.”

She went upstairs quietly, without flurry, without haste, chatting softly and pleasantly to the little ones. She sat by them, too, until they fell asleep, just as quietly and calmly as if no ax had been struck at the root of her hopes—as if the beautiful air-built castle, in which she had thought to dwell so happily with Steve, had not been shattered. She would not allow herself to think. “Wait,” she said to her heart—“wait till bedtime comes, and soli-

tude; there will be time for grieving. Not now—not when they might see and know. Wait!”

Into her own room she went when the little ones were asleep, but she only stayed there a few moments, to rearrange her hair, and rub her pale cheeks with cologne until they glowed again. Then down to the parlor again—to James, and conquest.

She pleased the man of money wonderfully. She was gay, winning, brilliant, bent on pleasing, and so successful that even the women owned her charm. Steve was the only one who did not yield to it, but grew actually gloomy and sulky when she gayly rallied him and congratulated him on his approaching happiness. But then, Mercy suggested, that was because he wanted his pretty sweetheart all to himself, and wished the rest of them out of the way; and it was, doubtless, to accommodate him that she presently carried James away to the piano, and monopolized his attention altogether.

“A splendid girl!” said the man of money to his mother, as they were walking home, Steve and Ada being considerably in advance of them. “The handsomest girl I ever saw! Why, she’s a cousin to be proud of!”

The little mother hung a little more closely on his arm.

“Yes, she is handsome,” she assented, rather unwillingly, “and she is the chief reason I had for hurrying on this match of Steve’s. He evidently admired her, and I was afraid he might—”

James interrupted her with an exclamation of impatience and disdain.

“What! Steve?” he said, contemptuously. “Steve, without a dollar, aspire to a girl like that! If she’s as sensible as I take her to be, she wouldn’t look at Steve. Beauty like hers has its actual market value, and Mercy Craven, without a penny, may yet be the wife of a millionaire!” He spoke that word with the same tone and air in which he might have said, “the wife of a king.” Then

he added, more quietly: "Not that I hold with such nonsense myself, as you know, mother. Riches should marry riches, and I leave love to fools. But all men do not think alike, you know, and I tell you that Mercy Craven is beautiful enough and brilliant enough to marry—always supposing that she plays her cards properly—to marry a millionaire."

---

## CHAPTER XXII.

## A WOMAN SCORNED.

FROM her dark corner, behind the curtains and among the flowers, Mercy had heard the merry voices, seen the door open wide, seen Ada's radiant, blushing face, and Mrs. Raymond's look of joyful triumph; had seen, too, a certain pale distress and trouble in Steve's glance, as for a moment it met her own, that half warned her of a coming trial.

But nothing warned her of what that trial should be. He was her lover. Her promised husband (for, in their stolen interviews it had come to that). And although he had confessed to "a sort of flirtation with Ada," which placed him awkwardly with his family, and forced him to beg her—Mercy—to be patient, and keep their engagement a secret for awhile; still he had said nothing that could prepare her for the actual truth. He had not dared to be candid with her.

The more he saw of her the greater his passion for her grew, and—necessarily—the less became his confidence in her affection, and of his hopes of winning her. Each time they met he feared to tell her that which might estrange her from him.

"I'll wait until I am a little more sure of her heart," he would resolve.

And all the time it was but too surely his; for Mercy, having no doubt of his truth and faith, and feeling, there-

fore, only just so much jealousy of Ada as served for a spur to her affection, Mercy truly loved him.

And this is said of a girl who, all her life long, had hungered and thirsted for human affection. Whose natural loves had been so checked and curbed, and dammed up (as one might say) within unnatural limits, that they ran with passionate and uncontrollable force into this new-found channel of her love for Steve.

This passion had come like a new life to her, beautifying all that else was cold and bare, rounding out and filling in all the hard squares and sharp angles and aching voids of that peculiarly harsh and undesirable "lot in life unto which it had pleased God to call her."

It had softened her heart and sweetened her nature, not toward Steve alone, but toward her mother, Polly, the two little children—all the world.

Even for Ada she could spare a pang of pity—poor Ada! who had loved Steve in vain! A rival truly, but an unsuccessful one, and therefore only to be pitied.

The girl had little or no religious training, but one of the first effects of this strange, new happiness had been to turn her thoughts toward God.

Not in the sense in which that phrase is generally used as implying that she gave up the "pomps and vanities," etc.—which course she was very far indeed from contemplating, being, on the contrary, especially jubilant on the score of her lover's supposed wealth, and the worldly triumphs which it was to secure her—but her thoughts turned heavenward in an impulse of prayer and grateful thanksgiving to which they had hitherto been strangers.

"God grant it be not a cloud that presages storm!" had been her heart's first cry when a foreboding of evil came to it, and when that foreboding was forgotten and her hold upon Steve seemed assured, again and again she had thanked God for so great and strange a happiness.

In short, happiness had had an altogether beneficial

effect upon Mercy's nature (as it has upon all human nature, I think), and all the soft, sweet, womanly traits of her character had blossomed and expanded under the influence of pleasure and joy, as flowers do for sunshine and rain.

Never was sudden frost and storm more fatal to the flowers than this discovery of what naturally appeared to her, Steve's perfidy, was to Mercy's happiness.

Drawing back behind the curtains, more in a momentary and startled hesitation than with any idea of playing the secret listener, she had heard the words that had wrecked her hopes and proclaimed her trust in her lover "a trust betrayed."

For the first moment the shock literally stunned her, so that it was from something like actual insensibility that she was presently aroused by the utterance of her own name.

Then pride came to the rescue instantly. What had Steve thought of her, meant by her, taken her for? she asked herself when he, the actual betrothed of another woman, could so cruelly and falsely deceive her?

She did not stop to consider that the love-making between them had been, in its beginning, quite as much of her own initiating as of Steve's; which of us does, when freshly smarting under a bitter wound, pause to accurately adjust the blame upon the proper shoulders?

He had deceived her with false promises, misled her by false hopes, perhaps intended her still worse wrong and insult; to her excited feelings all seemed possible.

In that first pang of jealous anguish and love betrayed, she almost hated Steve.

"He has been playing with his pretty country cousin," she thought, bitterly; "I'll make him think I was only fooling, too; I'll die before he shall know that I care!"

And she came from her hiding-place, cold, and calm,



and smiling, without a sign of the agony that smile concealed, except the pallor of her lovely face.

How she laughed, jested, spread her net and wove her spells, through the hours that followed, has been told. Certain it is that she sent two lovers home that night, where there had been but one, and that she knew it.

“I can have James, the elder brother, the richest brother, if I choose,” she said to herself, as she looked in her glass that night. “I know I can! Steve shall see that his betters are glad and proud to marry me!” Then suddenly she struck her hands together with a bitter cry: “His betters! I thought there was not one in the world to equal my love! My love!” And with these words the tears gushed forth, but only to be dashed away, with swift-recurring anger and wounded pride. “He is not worth a tear! What has made me fancy that I loved him? I have known men worth ten of him that could not have won a smile from me!” And swift before the eyes of her mind arose the various suitors whom she had despised. “Ah, there was not one of them like Steve! I love him! I love him! I may confess it here, to my own heart, I love him! And I must see another woman his wife. ‘Steve’s wife,’ they said—oh, how the words stab me! What will the reality be, when it comes? And how glad, and bright, and proud she looked, while my heart was broken! And yet”—with a sudden consoling reflection—“her happiness found no echo in him, I noticed; and he was silent, sullen, inwardly raging with jealousy while I flirted with James. Does he love me, then, in spite of all? Oh, I hope so!” She sprung up, her cheeks crimson, her eyes flashing, her hands clasped and wrung passionately. “Oh, I hope so, that I may be revenged! That I may make him feel as I feel now, may tempt him, torture him, play with him, let him taste the anguish he has caused me. If I can not have the love, the happiness, that comes to other women’s lives, at least I can have revenge on him—

ay, and on her, too! There won't be much happiness in her married life when she sees her husband's heart stray, as Steve's heart will stray from her to me! I'll hold it, too. She shall feel that, however securely the casket may be hers, the jewel has been rifled by me. I'll play with him as a cat plays with a mouse, and when I've had revenge enough, I'll marry James and roll in wealth, and laugh at all of them! I, the poor country cousin, the woman they scorn, will laugh at all of them!"

She was far enough from laughter now, poor child, at any rate. Up and down her room she paced, up and down, for weary hours, spurred by the excitement of the inward storm that would not let her rest. And when, at last, Nature so far asserted her claims that bodily fatigue overcame mental torture, and she threw herself, all dressed as she was, upon the bed, even then wild thoughts of jealousy and vengeance kept the needed sleep away. She lay and listened to the solemn tones that told of the departure of the hours—lay and watched the gray, bleak, wintery dawn chase the shadows of night away. When it was barely daylight, and she could hear the quiet movements of the servants going about their morning duties long before the sun was up, she arose softly and prepared to go out into the streets.

"I look like a ghost," she sighed, as she glanced at her mirror. "But the air will give me color; and that pallor is better, any way, than eyes all swollen with tears would be. They shall never pity me as a maiden all forlorn, nor mock me as 'a woman scorned,' Cousin Steve! From this time forth I will do all the 'scorning;' and Steve is the last man, as well as the first, to whom my heart shall ever say, 'I love you.' What my lips may utter is a different matter. I need not trouble myself about deceiving. Steve being false, no man is worth believing—which is rhyme," she added, with a sad smile, as she went downstairs and out into the street, to begin a new chapter of

her destiny. "And they say that when you make an unconscious rhyme, you may make a wish along with it, and get it. What shall I wish for, having been robbed of what I wished for most? Revenge only! And Cousin James, with his wealth, can help me to it. I wish that I may win my cousin James!"

---

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A WISH FULFILLED.

THE clocks were chiming half after seven as Mercy left the house and turned up Madison Avenue. That quiet thoroughfare was very quiet indeed at this early hour, and the few passers-by, intent on their several businesses, took as little notice of the pale, thoughtful girl as she did of them; until, as she approached a crossing made by the intersection of one of the side streets with the avenue, she almost ran into the arms of a man who was coming hurriedly around the corner, and who started back with a muttered oath when he saw her face, and turned his own head aside as she raised her eyes, and, with a hoarsely muttered, "Beg your pardon, miss," passed her and went down the avenue.

Mercy, though startled for the moment by his rough oath, was too full of sad and bitter thoughts to give him more than a passing glance, else she might have observed that he was a tall, broad-shouldered, Italian-looking sort of fellow, wearing coarse clothes, and having a rough fur cap pulled well down over his eyes and ears, where the up-standing collar of his coat met it, so as to, between the collar and cap, effectually conceal his face. But there was nothing extraordinary in that circumstance on a raw, cold, early winter morning. People went muffled, sensibly enough, to protect their noses and ears from the weather.

What was peculiar in this man's conduct was that he

evidently recognized Mercy and avoided her; and yet, first making sure that he was not observed, furtively watched her, too. In fact, so much interested in her movements did he appear, that, when a safe distance lay between them, and he felt quite assured that she had not noticed him, and would not look round, he turned and softly followed her.

She walked briskly, still urged by the keen spur of those cruel thoughts of Steve. The winter wind kissed her soft young cheeks into a rosy glow, and the bracing air and rapid motion—to say nothing of an inward passion and fire, repressed indeed, but nevertheless leaping out every now and then in most expressive flashes from her brilliant eyes and around her mobile mouth—sent the warm blood coursing swiftly through her veins with a vigor that made amends for midnight vigils and want of sleep.

Her thoughts were all of anger and revenge, but this very fact lent an expression of strength and power to her beautiful features, which, because they were beautiful, gave them a strange, new charm to one who had hitherto only seen them quiet and pale, or animated with merriment and pleasure.

And such a one was watching her as she came out of Madison Square, as well as the man with the muffled face, whose secret espionage had led him at last to hide among the trees in the park. He had two to take note of now as he came from his hiding-place, still bent on following her; for he had been quicker than she was to see James Raymond standing at the gate, with eyes full of admiration (and something more!) fixed on her, as, all unconscious of his presence and his gaze, she approached him.

Was she thinking of the wish she had made as she left the house that she started so when he addressed her! And did she, with true womanly inconsistency, take it rather amiss that Fate should give this sign of intending to take her at her word? Be that as it may, the startled look with

which she met the greeting of the man of money was scarcely such as, from a less beautiful face, would have been calculated to please or flatter him.

“ You!” she said, with an intonation that chilled him, until the ready smile and altered tone that followed it almost instantly made amends. “ Why, Cousin James, how you frightened me!”

And she gave him a half-reproachful glance from those irresistible eyes of hers that set his heart beating and the blood tingling through his veins after a fashion in which the cool heart and cool blood of James Raymond had never beaten or tingled before.

“ Did Polly send you for me?” she asked, as she slipped her little hands around the arm he offered, looking up into his face the while with a most enchanting air of child-like simplicity, “ and is she angry?”

It was most skillfully and naturally done. Mercy knew perfectly well that Polly had not sent for her, but the question served to place her own unprotected and friendless position strongly before James’s eyes. As for him, looking into this exquisite face, feeling this clinging touch upon his arm, hearing this softly appealing tone, he felt an unreasonable flash of sudden anger, that poor Polly should assume any authority over the beautiful creature at all.

“ What the devil should Polly be angry for?” he asked, brusquely, for he was not always soft and smooth, this politic and subtle money-maker, but could use hard words as well as fair ones, and dirty tools as well as clean ones upon occasion, too, if necessary to serve his ends. But he corrected himself on seeing her startled face—purposely startled and timid, if he had only guessed it—and went on more gently thenceforth, patting the little hand upon his arm reassuringly the while. “ I beg pardon for that ugly word, but why should Polly be angry? She didn’t send



me to you. I haven't seen her, indeed, but why should she send after you at all, or be angry with you, Mercy?"

Mercy shot him the effective glance again—more effective than ever this time, because there was a touch of patient pathos in it, that—coming from such a queen among women, was really quite bewildering to James.

"I am only a dependent in your sister's house, you know," she said, with quiet sadness that somehow seemed to make the fact a fault on Polly's part. "Only a poor relation. I hope my services about the house are some small return for the cost of keeping me until I shall find some position wherein I may earn my bread, but, all the same, I feel that I have no more right to leave the house without Polly's knowledge and permission than her servants have. She would say so, I am sure. But I had such a headache after our laughing and singing last night, cousin. I am a country girl, you know, accustomed to go to roost with the birds, and my country remedy for a headache has always been an early morning walk. I came out before the household was awake, but since I met you, cousin, I fear I have stayed too long. What time is it?"

It was nearly nine, he told her, and he turned in the direction of Seventeenth Street as he made the answer.

"I'll take you back," he said, quietly, "and Polly won't have a word to say, I'll warrant you."

She thanked him, quite effusively for her, and away they went, still followed by their unseen and unsuspected escort. He contrived that they should pass him at the gate, and thus he obtained a view of both their faces—Mercy's, upraised, brilliant, confiding, flushed, and beautiful; James's, admiring, brooding, smiling, frowning, thoughtful, doubtful, all at once. The man, whose own face was muffled out of sight, stared at these two as they passed by, and gave a long, low whistle.

"By Jove, but she's a beauty, and no mistake!" he muttered, as he slouched after them; "and she's got that

rich fish fairly on her hook, if she'll only have sufficient sense to land him!"

The fish was nibbling, beyond all doubt. James Raymond walked beside his beautiful companion, sensible that his feelings toward her were different to any that he had ever experienced toward any living creature in the world. It was not only passion that possessed him—a mere coveting of so much beauty and grace to have and hold for his own. He went further than that. His sentiments toward her almost approached generosity, and he had never been generous, even in thought, before. He resented her position in Polly's household, was angry at the possibility of fault being found with her, regretted her poverty—for her sake, and also, perhaps, a little for his own. "What a wife, if she had only money as well as beauty!" he was thinking as she talked and smiled beside him. "But then, with money and beauty, too, she might pick and choose among men; now, I suppose, a fellow with a few hundred thousands might stand a chance—and there are plenty foolish enough to ask her. Plenty! Ay, scores!" as if arguing the subject and defending such a course to himself. "And why not? Men have their own ways of spending their wealth—why not buy beauty, if that's their fancy? But—but"—half doubtingly—"I don't think it ever would be mine, unless money went hand in hand with it."

He had been so absorbed in his own thoughts that he had not heeded her prattle, and now broke in upon it abruptly.

"You spoke just now about getting a place to earn your own living," he said, brusquely. "Governess, I suppose, or something of the kind. But what nonsense, Mercy! You will stay with Polly, and by and by, when you've gone into society a little, marry some rich man. A girl like you ought to marry her fortune, you know. Don't you think so?"

She looked up into his eyes and shook her head.

“Wealth mates with wealth, I think, cousin,” she answered, simply. “At least,” with a laugh, “all the lovers I have had so far have been poor enough, and therefore suitable matches—for I am poor, you know.”

“Perhaps that’s why you have taken none of them,” James answered, drawing her hand more closely within his arm at this mention of “all her lovers.” “Love mates with its opposite, somebody says. You are the sort of woman that ought to have a carriage, and diamonds, and all the rest of it. Marry none but a rich man, Mercy.”

Half unconsciously he was putting in a plea for himself that might serve in the possibilities of the future. She laughed as she replied:

“But where shall I find my rich man? Rich men don’t care for poor, pretty girls like me. Now would you, if you were rich, cousin?”

There was no possibility of his answering this point-blank question, for as she asked it they had reached the house door, which was standing open. Otherwise Mercy would not have asked it at all. James took it in silence as a proof that she knew nothing of his wealth, and that therefore whatever favor she had shown him was shown from liking for himself alone. And this was exactly what Mercy had intended to convey to him.

As they went into the house Steve was coming out. He started at sight of these two together, and frowned darkly at Mercy’s smiling face and merry laughter.

“You seem to have been enjoying yourselves,” he sneered.

“Oh, yes,” Mercy answered, brightly. “Cousin James is so kind. We have had a charming walk. Come, James, and make it right with Polly.”

And she went on gayly, not noticing or caring for the frowning glance that James bent upon Steve, nor the look

of hatred that marred Steve's bright face, as he watched his rich elder brother.

And yet there was that in the faces of these two men that might have made one shudder—remembering Cain.

---

## CHAPTER XXIV.

“You didn't know that Mercy and I had made an appointment for an early morning walk together,” said James Raymond to Mrs. Lester, not allowing her time to put the reproaches which her looks were full of into words. “It's a treat to me to find a lady who is an early riser, and we have enjoyed the morning air hugely without inconveniencing you, I hope, Polly, since I've brought our cousin back by half past nine. What the deuce brought Steve round here so early?” he went on abruptly, without giving her time to reply to his last remarks. “What did he want?”

Now, James Raymond was “a power” in his own family, and Polly was very careful not to offend him. Apart from her natural sisterly affection for him she constantly held in consideration her two children, who, if Uncle James did not marry, might eventually be his heirs, and to whom in his favor and interest must in any case be advantageous through life. His attention to Mercy filled her with a vague alarm, but she had no intention of offending him by showing either that or her vexation—so she smothered both like a politic little woman, and answered him very pleasantly:

“Steve brought me a message from his lady-love, to be ready to go out shopping with her at twelve. They are to be married so soon, I suppose she wants to hurry her preparations. But you'll take some breakfast, James, you must both be hungry,” with a smiling glance at Mercy, as James, complying with her invitation, took a place at the breakfast-table next to his handsome cousin. “For if

such a thing could be as that James should make a fool of himself about her," reasoned Polly, rapidly, "I had better be in the list of her friends than her enemies, any way."

So she made herself unusually agreeable to Mercy, who, stung by the mention of Steve's "lady-love," exerted herself more than ever to please James, and with such success that he actually remained with her—"fooled the whole morning away," was what Polly told Dick Lester afterward—until Ada, arriving to carry Polly off shopping, insisted on his playing escort to them both, and gaining her point took him away triumphantly.

But even then he left more of his heart behind him than the ladies guessed, or than he would have been quite willing to acknowledge even to himself.

The regret that such a lovely, brilliant girl should have no money sprung up more strongly than ever in his thoughts, but only to be checked and counteracted (as at first) by that other reflection:

"If she had wealth as well as such beauty, richer and better men than I might whistle for her, with nothing but trouble for our pains."

And then he smiled half contemptuously at the idea of James Raymond desiring a penniless beauty for a wife, and in the next instant frowned, at the quick-recurring conviction that plenty of other rich men would so desire her, and that one of them might carry off the prize.

"They shall not," he thought, impulsively, although next instant he laughed at his own thought.

In short, the man of money was so near being seriously in love, for the first time in his life, that it already needed only the additional spur of a real rival to goad him on to the perpetration of what he had hitherto considered the greatest of follies—namely, a marriage which had for its motive and object love alone.

Meantime the girl who occupied his thoughts so entirely had thrown herself upon her bed, quite ignoring



Polly's charge that she should play mistress during her absence, and, worn out with excitement, emotion, and want of rest, was very soon fast asleep.

She slept long and soundly, nature and youth taking their revenge for her previous night of wakefulness and care.

The clock had struck five when a servant awakened her at last, standing by her bed, with the words:

"Mrs. Lester has just come in, Miss Craven, and asked for you."

She got up instantly, and bathed her face, and arranged her hair, preparatory to going down-stairs.

The memory of her grief came down upon her like a pall, as sorrow that has been banished by sleep always does in the first moment of awakening.

Her heart felt cold and numb with its weight of care, and as the thought of Polly brought the remembrance of Ada to her mind, she actually shuddered and grew sick and pale with the bitter agony of jealousy.

"I hope she has not come home with Polly. I hope I shall not have to see her, and talk to her, perhaps witness her happiness, if he comes this evening also. Oh, I hope not! If she is to be here I will tell Polly I have a headache, and— No, I can't do that! It would be like confessing to Steve how much I suffer. I must bear it and smile and seem happy. Happy, oh, God help me!"

She dashed her gathering tears away, and went down-stairs to the room in which the storm had burst upon her the previous evening. Here she thought herself sure of finding Polly. She paused a moment, with her hand upon the handle of the door, to press one hand upon her rebellious heart, and force a smile for that possible and dreaded meeting with her triumphant rival; then she went quietly into the room--no one there!

It was a large and pleasant apartment, looking peculiarly bright and comfortable now, with its orderly stillness

and silence undisturbed by human presence, and its soft carpets and rich furniture full of suggestions of warmth and rest and ease. It was brilliantly and yet softly lighted by gas and fire, and heavy velvet curtains, falling in rich folds before the three windows, shut out all sight and sound of the cold, wintery street, where the snow lay thick and the wind went moaning dismally. The three windows were of a peculiar fashion, almost as deep as bays, each one of them holding a stand of flowers, which the curtains, when closely drawn, concealed.

At one of them, the furthest, the curtains slightly shook and trembled as Mercy entered the room and closed the door behind her.

"The draught from the door," she said to herself, and remembered that some camellias there—Polly's special pride, and which she (Mercy) had volunteered to take especial care of—had had no attention that day.

"I forgot all about them, poor, pretty things!" thought Mercy, remorsefully, for she was fond of flowers; and it was while standing in that very window, attending to their wants, that the wound from which her heart was bleeding now had been dealt her. "When I went to that window last night—only last night—how happy I was!" she thought. "But the poor flowers must have some water."

She turned toward the door with the intention of procuring some. It opened, softly and suddenly, and Steve, entering hastily and encountering her face to face, stood before her, with hands outstretched in a gesture of entreaty, and her name—uttered in a tone that made it sound like an anguished and despairing prayer—upon his lips.

"Mercy! Mercy! At last I have a chance to speak to you—to explain! No, no; don't turn away from me; you must hear me! Oh, Mercy! my love, my love!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

“ TOGETHER.”

SHE had not turned away, but she had shrunk back at sight of him, as one might shrink from a lightning flash.

“ You!” she murmured, “ you!” and for some seconds could say no more, but stood with one small white hand resting upon the table, as if to steady and support the form that was trembling violently. Oddly enough, those heavy velvet curtains at the furthest window trembled strangely too, though to be sure the draught caused by Steve’s entrance might have been to blame for that. Anyhow, Mercy and Steve had something else to think of than such a trifle, and so the strange sympathy with Mercy’s emotion displayed by one pair of curtains out of three passed unnoticed.

But when Steve, with his impassioned cry, came forward as if to clasp her in his arms, Mercy shrunk back indeed, and with a look of anger so intense that it was almost a look of loathing.

“ Don’t come nearer! Don’t touch me!” she cried, in a strange, smothered, passionate voice. “ You — you traitor!”

But he rebelled instantly at that name. And as Mercy saw all the boyish eagerness of his love-making reflected in the boyish eagerness of his defense, she was touched and moved to listen to it.

“ You shall not call me traitor, you shall not! I am true to you and will be true. Do you think I mean to marry Ada and put an insuperable barrier between you and me? You must think me mad then! Love, I would rather blow my brains out than marry any woman but you! Listen! Give me some chance to explain all to you! Don’t condemn me and throw me over unheard! I

swear I mean well and truly by you, Mercy. She—that other woman—may have cause to call me a traitor indeed, but, love, not you! Not you!”

And again he came toward her, and would have caught her to his breast, but again she shrunk from him and repulsed him.

“We both have cause!” she answered him, speaking still in that suppressed, passionate voice, while her splendid eyes poured lightnings of reproach and love upon him. “You are false to both of us! She believes that you love her, that you will marry her; the very fact that you have allowed any woman to even think such a thing is base and cruel treachery to me! You were sworn to me as my lover; you are betrothed to her as her husband; is not this being false to both? But I don’t call you to account for wronging her; my own wrong is enough for me to deal with. You have betrayed my trust and broken my heart. Oh, yes! Although I smile and flirt with your brother James—or any other—and shall marry some wealthier man than you, and live through a long life of pride and prosperity, in spite of all this you have done me a wrong that nothing can ever atone for! You have destroyed my trust in human nature; you have crushed the dearest hopes of my woman’s heart; you have blighted my happiness. I was a trusting, loving girl. I shall be henceforth a calculating, heartless, and revengeful woman! Let no other man trust me, this one man whom I loved being so false; henceforth I have no heart. You—you have killed it!”

The passionate vehemence of her own feelings long pent up and curbed, now suffered to find utterance thus freely, quite overcame her. She lost the long-maintained self-control that had sustained her, and flinging up her arms with a despairing gesture and a curiously pathetic little cry, sunk into a chair that stood beside her and burst into a passion of tears.

The effect upon Steve was extraordinary. Never had he seen his proud, beautiful love anything but mistress of herself and her emotions; even in the moments when her heart had seemed most tender toward him, a certain natural pride of character had enabled her to maintain a reserve of manner which had kept him in ignorance of his own power. And now to see her give way thus!

To see her tears, to hear her sighs, and know her love for him the cause! It was too much to bear! Ada, his promises, his interests, all were forgotten; in a frenzy of love, remorse, delight, he flung himself down beside her, and throwing his arms around her strained her passionately to his heart.

“My darling!” he breathed between fast-falling kisses, which she did not repulse. “My life! Now I know that you do really love me! Oh, my darling, if I had been sure of that before, I should have been more candid with you, but I feared to lose you, my sweet! my love, and so I dared not tell you all my difficulties, nor can I now, for some one may interrupt us, and I must have an opportunity to decide upon our future course before the crash comes. Our course, dearest, whatever it be, since you love me, we will take together. Only let me say now that this match with Ada was of my mother’s making, and I was led into compromising myself with her before I saw you—the one, the only woman whom I can ever love! I tried to keep the unlucky engagement a secret, hoping to find an opportunity of appealing to Ada to release me, but she loves me—”

Mercy interrupted him with a jealous cry. Her arms were round his neck, her tears had ceased, her eyes gazed into his with passionate intensity. At this moment she saw but him, thought but of him, as he saw and thought only of her.

The sympathetic curtains in the distant windows trembled as if the wintry blast outside had got in and went



wandering through their folds, but the lovers never noticed them.

Indeed, it would have needed a blast strong enough to tear the heavy velvet from its fastenings, and hurl it at their feet, to arouse them from their bliss of tender reconciliation, coming after estrangement and jealous pain.

Mercy interrupted Steve with a little passionate cry that was half a sob, and stopped his utterance with a soft, white hand, half pleading, half imperious.

“You shall not say that she loves you!” she said, reproachfully. “What right has she to love my Steve? You are mine, you know, if you love me!” Then, sinking her voice and laying her soft cheek against his hair, as he knelt beside her: “Do you—do you really love me, Steve?”

His answer may be imagined. His kiss, his close embrace, these spoke more eloquently than words, not that words were wanting, either.

Warm and passionate they burst from his passionate heart, assuring her of her empire there.

“But, all the same, my dearest, it is but too certain that Ada is attached to me,” he went on, seriously and anxiously, when this love episode was past. “And I can not but reproach myself with having thoughtlessly and ignorantly trifled with feelings which, before I met you, I did not even comprehend. We owe it to her to make her disappointment as light as possible. She is good and gentle. So gentle that, I hope, she neither loves as you can love, my darling, nor will suffer as you could suffer. I hope and believe that, when I tell her the whole truth, how utterly my heart is yours, she will of her own accord set me free from my engagement; but when I think of her pain—”

Again Mercy interrupted him with that low, thrilling cry:

“*Her pain!* Think of *mine* when they speak of her as

your intended wife—of you as her lover! Oh, you have taught me what the agony of jealousy is—”

Steve caught her hands in his.

“As you have me! Love, why did you favor James so pointedly? He is richer far than I can ever hope to be. But, if his wealth can take you from me, I think I should kill him, Mercy, though he is my brother! Oh, love! say that you do not care for him!—that you care for none but me!”

“For none but you!” she answered, frankly and fondly, and giving kiss for kiss. “For none in the world but you. You are more to me than wealth, friends, life—my own dear lover! But you must deal fairly by me. I can not endure that this girl should even look at you, or think of you as hers. I can not bear that you should forget my jealous suffering in considering hers. Let this very night, or, at all events, to-morrow, end it. I will keep out of the room to-night, that I may not see her eyes look on you as if you were hers, and to-morrow tell her the truth. Surely, when she knows that you do not love her, she will not even wish to be your wife, she will be glad to set you at liberty.”

“Glad or sorry, it must be done!” cried Steve, with a sudden sternness of tone and firmness of resolution, the cruelty of which, to Ada, he did not actually realize. “I can not fulfill my engagement! If she refuses to set me free—”

“She will not refuse!” said a low, sad, tremulous voice behind them—a voice at which Mercy uttered a shriek, and, both the lovers springing to their feet and turning, found Ada West confronting them. “She will hold no man bound who wishes to be free; she desires no man’s hand unless his heart goes along with it. I believed that yours did so—you taught me to believe so—”

Her low voice, full of tears, broke suddenly under the weight of her emotion. She caught at the curtains, beside

which she stood—just where Mercy had stood last night—as if to sustain herself. Tears streamed undisguisedly down her face—a face as sweet and pale as a white rose-leaf. For a few moments no one spoke; then Ada, gathering new self-control, went on, gently:

“ You must not think I meant to play the eavesdropper. When Mercy came into the room I was looking at these flowers, and, thinking it was my lover, and meaning to startle him a little, I drew back and let the curtains fall around me. When Steve came in, indeed ”—her voice deepened here and her bosom heaved—“ I was at first too much shocked and overcome to make my presence known, and afterward I thought it best for all our sakes to hear the truth.” She paused a moment, pressing her hands upon her heart. “ And I have heard it,” she resumed, in a voice that all her pride could no longer render calm. “ I know now that I have no claim on Steve, for he belongs not to the woman who loves him, but to the woman whom he loves. No one ”—she looked at Mercy here, but shrinkingly, as if the sight were hateful—“ no one can dispute your right to a heart that loves you so truly. I yield my claims to yours. Make him as happy as I would have tried—”

She quite broke down, grief would have its way in spite of pride. With the instinct of the hunted animal that steals away to hide its wounds in secret, she also turned to fly; but, as she reached the door and opened it, Steve’s pleading voice arrested her.

“ Ada—my dear little friend and sister—Ada, say that you forgive me! I do not deserve it—I have deserved your bitterest reproaches—but, oh, forgive!”

She turned her sweet face on him, smiling through her tears.

“ I forgive you freely. After all, what is there to forgive? We can not help our hearts. That Mercy has won

yours is not your fault, and why should I blame you? No; I have no reproaches for you."

She paused one minute, her hand still on the half-opened door, her eyes fixed on his face.

"I thank God that you learned to know your heart before you married me," she sighed; then, turning away, "Good-bye, dear, and may God bless you! Marry Mercy, and may you both be happy!"

At that instant the door, forced from her hand, was opened wide, and there stood James Raymond and Polly Lester on the threshold, and from their faces, pale with consternation, and yet black with anger, too, it was evident that they had heard all Ada's words.

Steve, after one glance at the new-comers, stepped manfully up to Mercy's side, and cast an arm around her.

"This is my place," said he, in a quiet voice, but with kindling eyes; then, lower still, to her: "The crash has come, my dearest. Be true to me—be brave, and we will stand or fall together!"

---

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### WHAT JANE CRAVEN SAID.

THE scene that followed was a stormy one. Polly, who had prevented Ada's retiring, inveighed loudly and bitterly against people who hadn't a dollar to their names, and about whom nobody knew anything, presuming to interfere with a young man's prospects, and perhaps leading him into folly that should ruin him for life.

"If you love him, save him from himself by holding him to his engagement," she cried to Ada, passionately.

But Ada only shook her head, looking deeply pained.

"He was never mine to hold," she said, simply. "I would not marry him, knowing what I know now, for twenty worlds! Pray let me go, Polly, my presence is not needed here; pray let me go!"

But now James detained her. He had not spoken one word yet, contenting himself with looking on upon, and listening to, the storm—perhaps remembering that the lookers-on often gain a truer knowledge of the game than is possessed by the persons who are playing it.

One deep and bitter curse had been imprisoned between his set teeth—not permitted to pass his lips—when Steve went and took his place at Mercy's side; but he had not spoken audibly until now, when he placed himself in Ada's path to prevent her leaving the room.

"Let me beg of you to remain here for a few minutes," he said, gravely. "This marriage engagement, whether in its making or its breaking, is a serious matter, and in the case of a young man circumstanced as Steve is—" He glanced at Mercy here; the thought flashed across his mind—"does she know of his poverty?" Only the recollection of her light words that morning: "All my lovers are poor," kept him from enlightening her then and there. "After all," he thought, "she must know it, her own mother will have told her," and so he let the subject pass unnoticed. "In the case of a young man circumstanced as Steve is, his family, my mother and myself, should have some claim to be heard. My brother appears to have had the rare good fortune," pursued James, with a manner and tone of courtesy most unusual in him, "to win the favor of two charming girls, either of whom might make him more than happy. One of these, our dear Ada, has just declared that she will never marry him; the other, my charming cousin, Mercy, has apparently arrived at quite a different decision. Well, after all, this matter, so far as it concerns the feelings of the parties, is for the parties to settle and decide alone. But the affair has also quite another aspect—a business aspect—as Steve knows, and concerning that phase of it it is only right that I should advise him. Will you two ladies consent to take a little time to reconsider your recent decisions? And while you



do so leave Steve to his sister and me. Believe me, it is well to do nothing too hastily that may afterward be more easily repented of than undone."

"I shall never repent of my decision," said Ada, quietly. "To marry Steve now would be to me impossible. He loves Mercy. All the reconsidering in the world can not alter that. I wish him all happiness—and good-evening to you all. Polly, I will go home."

And without another word she left them.

Then Mercy turned to Steve.

"I shall not alter my decision unless at your request," she said to him, tenderly; for answer to which he clasped and kissed her.

She blushed crimson at this caress, given before unfriendly eyes, for in the glance of Polly she saw hate, and in that of James a keen and jealous envy. She gently disengaged herself from Steve's embrace.

"I will leave you to listen to your brother's advice," she said, softly, "and remember you are not bound to me one moment longer than you wish to be so. You shall find that I can be generous as well as Ada!" Then she turned to James. "Advise Steve for his good, dear Cousin James," she said, winningly, "and understand that he is still free, though"—and her eyes lent an additional meaning to these next words—"though I shall hold myself bound to him so long as he chooses to claim me. And now," she moved toward the door, "I will leave you together, as you wish, and go to my own room."

But at this Polly broke out passionately.

"To your own home!" she cried, stamping her foot violently. "You shall go to your own home, Mercy Craven, for I will no longer keep such a firebrand and mischief-maker in mine! Pack up your things; by the first train to-morrow morning you shall return to your mother! I wish it was possible to send you off to-night!"

"It is!" answered Mercy, proudly. "Not for worlds

would I pass another night under your roof. There is a train at eleven. I shall go by that. My preparations will be very quickly made. James, good-bye." She held out her hand to him. "You have been most kind to me. Steve, I shall see you presently."

"I shall go with you," cried Steve, impetuously. "If go you will and must, my darling; I shall accompany you myself, and take you safely home—"

James's voice, insinuating and soothing, interrupted him.

"After what has passed, perhaps Mercy will be happier, for the present, with her mother than here," he said, softly. "But do not say good-bye yet. Steve will take you home, if you please, but I will bear you company to the depot, at least, and see you off, my dear and charming cousin."

And so he did. By his seeming kindness and moderation he had managed to keep himself so neutral in the whole affair that all the parties to it looked upon him as a friend, for he seemed to sympathize with all, while taking sides with neither. Even Stephen made and felt no objection to his accompanying them to the depot.

"Take care of her while I get the tickets, Jim," he said, darting away as he spoke, and thus James got the opportunity for a private word with Mercy, which was what he had been striving for. He took it instantly, and his face was pale and his voice shook with the intensity of his earnestness.

"Mercy," he said, "let me say a word in your interest and for your ear alone. It is useless to deny that this is an unfortunate affair. There will be opposition, which Steve's circumstances hardly enable him to defy. If you persevere, it is to be feared that you may have to waste years of your bright youth in a long and doubtful engagement. But I want you to understand that, let who will oppose your wishes, I am always your true friend, who

would sacrifice his own dearest hopes to secure yours—his very life, if by so doing yours could be made happy. None the less,” he took her hand—“none the less so, Mercy, because Steve’s happiness is my misery. For I also love you with a passion that no boy can feel, and it would have been my pride to lay my fortune at your feet. You are too generous to betray my disappointment to my more fortunate rival,” he added, hastily, as Steve approached. “Keep my unhappy secret. I have revealed it only that you may know how devoted will be the service, should you ever accept it, of him who can never hope to be more to you, now, than your loving cousin and true friend.”

Steve’s return prevented Mercy giving any answer, except a grateful little pressure of the hand, which told him she understood and pitied him.

Another minute and good-bye was said; Steve and Mercy took their places in the train and were whirled away.

“But pity is akin to love,” muttered James; “and she will think of me, at least. That’s a step gained. Her thoughts will not be all her lover’s, now that she knows she may make such a much better match. The next thing is to get Steve quite out of her way. I must manage that. Meantime, she will think of me.”

He was right there; she did think of him, wondering how much richer he might really be than Steve, and feeling quite sure that it was far better to marry Steve upon thousands than James, or any one else, upon millions of money. She was tempted to ask Steve what his means really were, but refrained, remembering that her mother would inevitably spare her the trouble.

But Jane Craven asked no questions as to Stephen’s means; she already knew the circumstances of the whole Raymond family. What she did ask, first, as soon as the surprise of Mercy’s unlooked-for return was over, was, simply:

“What is wrong, then? What does this mean?”

Mercy answered promptly. She looked even more than usually beautiful—her eyes aglow, her cheeks like roses, her whole air triumphant. She thought she was about to give her mother a most agreeable surprise.

Steve stood watching her, a little less confident, perhaps, but smiling happily and proudly too. Said Mercy:

“It means, mother, that I had worn my welcome out. Polly was never very willing to have me, and when she learned that her brother had asked me to be his wife, and that I had accepted him—”

Jane Craven broke in abruptly, her keen eyes giving an anxious glance at Steve:

“Accepted him—without consulting me! Which of her brothers, then? James—is it James?”

Mercy shrunk a little before her mother’s earnestness; Steve grew pale.

“James—no,” Mercy answered, but less quickly than before. “I never saw James until yesterday, mother. No,” she turned to her young lover here, “I am engaged to Steve.”

Jane Craven sprung up with a cry of rage:

“To Steve! Ridiculous! an absurdity! How dare you talk such nonsense to me? Steve is a boy! Steve doesn’t possess a dollar in the world, any more than you do yourself! You, my daughter, for whom I’ve saved and toiled and planned, married to a man who hasn’t a penny!” She paused for breath and glared upon them both, quite white with fear and anger. “Never! you shall never marry him, unless with your mother’s curse upon your head! I’d rather put you into your coffin! I would rather, ay, a thousand times rather, see you dead!”

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## MERCY'S DECISION.

AFTER this outburst there was silence for a little while.

Mercy dropped into a chair beside which she had been standing, and looked first at Steve and then at her mother, and then back again to Steve, like one stunned. At last she spoke—only a few words, and those in a tone of utter bewilderment and disappointment.

“Steve poor! Poor! It can’t be possible!”

“It is not only possible, but true,” answered Mrs. Craven, scornfully, “unless I am out in my reckoning. If so, there he stands, let him deny it! And I must say, Stephen Raymond,” she added, turning upon him a glance of bitter contempt—“I must say that your conduct would have been more honorable had you told my daughter your true circumstances, instead of deceiving her—”

Mercy broke in passionately before Steve had time to answer one word.

“He did not deceive me! No word about means or money passed between us. I thought the Raymonds were all well off, and I had no way of learning otherwise. If there has been deception, I have deceived myself. I knew Steve was not so rich as James, of course, but I”—she suddenly held out both hands to her lover, who stood before her silent and pale—“but I loved him!”

The tender passion of her gesture and her words brought him instantly to her side.

“Oh, Steve!” she cried, pleading to him with such soft and loving womanliness that her mother gazed on her with amazement. “Dear Steve, say that it is not true. That you are not poor, that we shall not be parted.”

Those last six words were very significant. Jane Craven heard them with a kind of triumph.



“So!” she thought, “the child is not very far gone in her love-madness. She sees that his poverty must part them! All’s well. I can manage a love like that!” while poor Steve, looking at the beautiful, pleading, tender creature with eyes full of mingled passion and reproach, asked himself:

“Is this real love that can allow my poverty to part us?”

But to her he said, very sadly:

“My dearest, you have said truly that I never deceived you, nor will I ever. I thought—if ever I thought at all about it—that every one knew how my poor father’s will left everything to his two elder sons, Polly and myself being, at the time the will was made, unborn. But, Mercy, we are both so young, you will wait a little while for me, my darling? My mother will help me. She has only me to think of now, and I can work! James pays me a salary, which he promised the other day to increase—”

But the poor boy’s voice died away in a groan of despair as he recounted his hopes, so cruelly did the conviction of their worthlessness force itself upon him. James admired Mercy. Was it to be expected, then, that he would help another to her hand?

Mrs. Raymond’s heart had been set upon his marrying Ada. Could he hope that she would not only forgive her disappointment, but help him to wed another, whom she both disapproved of and disliked? Oh, no! Even a lover—a young and sanguine lover—could not lean long upon these wofully broken reeds without feeling that they gave way under him.

“You have come to laugh at me!” he cried, bitterly. For Jane Craven had laughed softly and maliciously. “I talk like a boy or a fool when I talk of aid from my mother or James. But I am bewildered. Until this moment I had not thought of ways and means to wed you, dear—I only thought of how to win you—”

“You must think *now*,” Jane Craven broke in, abruptly. “And, if you *do* think, you will confess that a marriage between you two is impossible. You talk like a boy, because you are one. I will not say you are a fool into the bargain, because older and wiser men than you will love my beautiful girl, and one of them—who can show wealth to back his wisdom—will marry her. You can not. Look at her!” She drew back a little, and pointed at the weeping girl—more beautiful in her tears and pallor than other women at their brightest and best. “Is that a woman to be hidden in some cheap boarding-house? or to do her own housework and nurse her own babies in a couple of rooms? I am speaking of marriage, you see—you two children have thought only of love! Marriage brings cares, responsibilities, expenses. How do you propose to meet them? Come, come, I am sure you will both acknowledge your folly. There is no harm done to anybody if you part at once, to meet henceforth only as cousins and as friends.”

But Mercy spoke out here—her eyes glowing, her cheeks afire, and Jane Craven saw, to her secret consternation, that her allusion to the “responsibilities” that marriage brings had done some serious injury to her cause.

“I shall marry no man but Steve,” announced Mercy, resolutely, no less to the astonishment than to the delight of her young lover. “As for the cheap boarding-house, or the two rooms, or—or other disagreeables, we need not encounter them at all. We shall simply wait and work until we are better off before we think of marriage. You can trust me, dear,” she said, tenderly, laying her soft, red cheek against her lover’s breast, and looking at her mother with half-suppliant, half-defiant eyes. “I will wait, and get my own living as a governess, until you can offer me something better than ‘two rooms.’ And James will help us,” she added, with a triumphant tone and glance. “He will, when you tell him it is for my sake.

He told me, when we parted, to ask anything I choose from him—to rely on finding him always my friend—always ready to advance my wishes. Say to him, ‘Mercy relies on you to help us,’ and see if he does not prove our friend.”

So Stephen jumped at this extended straw interposed between him and the sea of despair which had threatened to engulf him; and Mrs. Craven, sitting silently and frowningly thoughtful, forbore to oppose her daughter any further just then. The young people sat down at last to the breakfast which they sorely needed but had had no time to think of, and it was agreed that Steve should, immediately after it, return to town.

“And let us say no more about the matter until we learn what James and Mrs. Raymond will really do,” Jane Craven said, resignedly. “If there is really any reasonable prospect of your marriage, I shall not—however great my own disappointment may be—I shall not oppose your happiness.”

A decision for which both Steve and Mercy rewarded her with grateful thanks and fondest kisses—all unconscious of the sinister smile with which she listened to their raptures, quite unsuspecting of the secret resolution which she had formed to separate them at every cost.

“But Mercy is headstrong, and to oppose her openly would only be to drive her to some folly,” she thought. “Fortunately I am a patient woman; I can wait.”

She did wait until Steve had gone, having also shown the lovers the motherly attention—with which they would gladly have dispensed—of accompanying them down to the depot. Then, as she and Mercy walked homeward again, she quietly asked:

“What else did James say when he bade you good-bye? What else, and what more, Mercy?”

And Mercy, understanding the meaning of her mother’s tone, and anxious to convince her of the rich man’s good-

will toward herself and Steve, told her all that James had said, as far as she could remember it.

Jane listened quietly to the very end.

“You might marry him,” she said, when her daughter ceased, “and he is a millionaire. You might have your diamonds and carriages, your houses in country and town—be a leader of society, famed as the loveliest woman in New York; and you prefer Steve! Some curse must be upon you, surely! Steve! A boy—a penniless nobody! What a miserable, senseless infatuation!”

Mercy turned hot and cold, red and pale, but she stood firm.

“I love him, mother,” she said, pleadingly, “and before I had seen James at all I was Steve’s betrothed.”

Jane answered, sharply and coldly:

“You are a consummate fool! Let me be alone awhile,” she added, as they entered the cottage. “I am cruelly disappointed in you, Mercy; leave me to myself awhile to get over it.”

But when Mercy obeyed her—very willingly and meekly, for she knew her mother’s temper and had expected harsher reproaches than these—Jane lost no time in idle regrets or repinings, but instantly sat down and wrote a brief note to James Raymond.

“I desire to see you,” she wrote. “You have professed yourself Mercy’s friend. If you are so, do not encourage her in a folly which she will regret forever. Give me an opportunity of seeing you privately, and let no one know I have written this. Come as if you were coming in their interests; but write me first when to expect you, so that I may have her out of the way for awhile. Write to the post-office.”

The next day but one brought her an answer. The next day after that James Raymond arrived. It was noon when he knocked at the cottage door, where Jane Craven sat

alone expecting him. Mercy had gone an hour before, at her mother's request, to call upon an acquaintance miles away, who, Jane said she had heard, was most dangerously sick of consumption. The girl came back at nearly four o'clock, tired and cold and angry, for her journey had been a useless one.

"I wonder you pay any attention to gossip, mother," she said, as she entered impatiently. "Mrs. Gray was just as well as you are this minute, and so I went on a fool's errand. Oh"—and her voice and look changed instantly to one of pleasure and surprise as she saw their visitor—"oh, now, indeed, I am glad to see you, cousin!" and she frankly put up her lovely lips for a kiss. "No one except"—with a shy glance—"except Steve, of course, could be more welcome to me than my cousin James!"

---

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### JAMES MAKES A PROPOSITION.

"JAMES came almost immediately after you started, Mercy," said Mrs. Craven, sparing James the necessity of replying, "and has been waiting ever since. We have discussed your affairs and prospects pretty thoroughly, I tell you; and I take it as very kind in a man like your cousin here to spend his time and thoughts upon a foolish boy and girl who are bent on rushing to their ruin. He has infected me with some of his own charitable patience, I suppose," she added, with a grim laugh, "or I should be tempted to take Mrs. Raymond's course, and threaten to disown my child if she did not renounce her foolish infatuation; but James seems to sympathize with lovers. Perhaps—and if so, I'm sure I wish him success and happiness—perhaps he is in love himself."

This speech had been carefully prepared and considered.

Mercy, guessing who James's love was, gave her mother



a quick, reproachful glance. James gave them both a sigh and a sad smile, which, with Mercy, were decidedly effective.

“I am not at all ashamed to confess that I am in love,” he said, quietly, “nor that my love is quite hopeless. The only success I covet is for my efforts to secure the happiness of the woman for whom I would die. Personally, I neither look nor hope for happiness. We can not all be so fortunate as Steve is,” he added, with a tender sadness that touched Mercy’s heart, for, seeing him so ready to acknowledge Steve’s claims, there seemed no treason in her pitying him. “The proverb says that it is better to be born lucky than born rich, and surely Steve exemplifies the truth of it. I would joyfully change my riches for his luck any day, sweet cousin.”

“You will have much better luck some day, I hope,” she answered, earnestly, at which he sighed and shook his head. “But is it true that Steve’s mother will disown him? Oh, James!”—with a little plaintive sob that touched him (though another man had called it forth), strangely and strongly.

So he hastened to reassure her.

“For the moment she will do so, no doubt; but my mother is the gentlest of women, and her anger will not last. All that is necessary is that Steve shall remain firm, and go elsewhere to seek his fortune. I am his stanch friend, for your sake; but I can not openly oppose my beloved mother, Mercy, and therefore I can do little for him in New York. She insists that I shall no longer employ him, and if I should contradict her I should but make matters worse; and really Steve’s earnings in my store amount to the merest trifle—he will do far better when he goes away. Don’t look so pale, dear cousin”—for Mercy’s face had changed and whitened—“he only thinks of going to California; it is but a trifling journey now, you know, for he shall go overland, of course. Trust him to me,

Mercy; I can procure him a position there in a house with which I have dealings, where he will be able to earn sufficient to make a home for you in a few years—one or two years, perhaps—while in New York he might toil and you might wait till all your youth was past, and even then be poor; besides, when my mother realizes that her youngest boy—her pet—is so far away, she will relent and recall him and consent to your marriage, rather than be parted from her child; and I shall be near her to work in Steve's interests, and urge her to forgive and consent. I offer to find Steve a good position, to pay all his expenses to San Francisco, and give him a couple of hundred dollars in hand; and I make the offer to you first, cousin, and leave it for your decision. If you think it a good offer, counsel him to accept it; if you do not think so, tell me what are your plans. Rest assured that I will help them, if possible. My happiness lies in securing yours."

But Mercy had no plans. Like her young lover, she had not thought of ways and means to wed him, bent only upon winning him and his love. He was won now, but he could not be claimed, it seemed. People—even lovers—must needs live, and to do that something more substantial than air was necessary.

She looked wistfully at James while he recapitulated the advantages of his own offer, and assured her of Steve's readiness to accept it, if only she would consent.

It hurt her a little that Steve should be so willing to go, but she would not say so, with her mother lauding the good sense of such a course, and James suggesting it only as the very best way to help them.

She had not the slightest doubt as to James's sincerity; she believed that the course he suggested was really the best way, only surely Steve need not have been so eager for the parting that she so dreaded. It seemed to her like indifference on his part, and stung both her affection and her pride.

"I can bear it if he can," she said to herself, proudly; and it was this imaginary coldness on poor Steve's part—wholly imaginary, for, in fact, he had thus far refused to entertain his brother's offer at all—that made her fall into James's plans with apparent readiness, and even promise to write Steve to that effect.

"For you must keep him up to the mark, you know. Steve is young, and something of a scatter-brain, perhaps," said James, with good-natured depreciation of his brother, which, though vaguely disagreeable to Mercy, did not go far enough to offend. "He is fortunate in having won a pearl among women, who will make a man of him. Write to him strongly, Mercy—urge him to make no delay, for the position which I can secure for him must be filled at once; and, though he saw the advantages of my offer, and wished to accept it, yet he very properly left the matter for you to decide. Let me take him your decision back to-night."

And Mercy, overpersuaded and overtalked — afraid, moreover, of offending this one friend, and unable to see any other road that seemed to lead to a hopeful ending—Mercy wrote—wrote that James had quite convinced her that this course was best; that Steve must be brave, as she would be, and sacrifice their present happiness to a future good; that she was willing to have him accept the position in San Francisco, and urged him to see her at the earliest moment possible, and then depart at once.

All this she wrote and intrusted to James to deliver, and, for awhile—while he praised her good sense, and protested his own devotion, and afterward, when her mother vaunted the virtues of this noble and disinterested lover—for so long, Mercy, excited and overwrought, believed that she had done well; but afterward, in the quiet, lonely night, reaction came, bringing doubts and fears along with it.

Steve's willingness to leave her rankled in her soul,

and that careless word, "scatter-brain," that James had uttered so lightly, troubled her. Why did they thus depreciate Steve? Her mother had called him, with bitter contempt, "a boy, a nobody!" But she did not care for that. "Scatter-brain" annoyed her far more. Had she placed her hopes on one whose character was so unstable? A memory of Ada came to add to her distress. Ada had not found Steve either stable, or stanch, or true; nay, he had, in a manner, played false to both—there was no denying it. And was this the man who was to be driven away to San Francisco—removed from her love and influence?

Bitterly now did she regret her haste in having written. Why, Ada was rich; she could follow him to San Francisco if she chose. "I would," Mercy acknowledged to herself. "He was her lover first." She had not the least faith in Ada's declaration, that nothing now should induce her to marry Steve.

"She will take him from me yet," thought the passionate, jealous, undisciplined heart. "She shall not, though! I will not let him go! I love him, and I will not live without him!"

She fell asleep at last, upon a pillow that was wet with tears, soothed by a new resolution. Let James deliver the letter, and let Steve come. Clapsed in her arms, looking into her love-lit eyes, would he then be willing to leave her? No! She would propose a better plan than this cruel one of parting. They would be married at once, without delay, and go to San Francisco together!

---

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A PROBLEM.

MEANTIME James Raymond made his way toward the depot—Mercy's letter to her lover lying safely in an inner breast-pocket of his coat, over a heart that, burning with

mad passion for the lovely writer, alternately swelled with rapturous hope and triumph, or grew cold and sick with involuntary misgiving and fear. He took the little missive from its hiding-place and kissed the letters her hand had traced, even while he cursed the name they formed.

"I must read this before Steve gets it. I must know all that she says to him," he thought. "He shall never have her! I will separate them at all costs!"

For this sudden appearance of a rival—a favored rival—on the scene, had supplied the needed spur of jealousy and driven him almost mad. This was his first serious passion, and it was so serious that the very thought of Mercy, as another's wife, caused him to feel tortures of jealousy so intolerable that they goaded him past all considerations of brotherhood or honor, and made him resolute to trample down everything that stood in the way of his own desires.

To this resolution Jane Craven had undoubtedly helped him. Her cold and calculating sophistries, her merciless ridicule of "this boy-and-girl love," her firm assumption of maternal authority and right to shape her daughter's destiny—these things had chimed in with his passion and resentment and lashed into dangerous activity the thoughts and wishes that, but for such a counselor, might have died in their own conception, powerless to do worse than desire evil. But now the evil spirit within his soul had "taken to it another spirit more evil than itself," and their plotting boded ill for the happiness of the young lovers.

"I would almost rather kill my child than see her ruin herself by a marriage with Steve!" Jane Craven had told him, passionately, and he had answered, resolutely, reassuring both himself and her:

"She shall never marry him!"

As yet, however, his plans went no further than the separation of the lovers.

"Part them," Jane Craven had urged. "'Out of



sight, out of mind,' is a true saying. Once get him to California, or Europe, and, with me to work upon her ambition, the game will be in your own hands. Letters may be intercepted. We will find the means. It has been done before, and can be done again, I tell you. The first thing is to get him out of the way, and, since he has refused your offer, work upon her so that she will urge him to accept it. Steve out of the way, all is easy, and I can promise you Mercy for your wife. But get rid of Steve!"

Those words sang themselves over in his heart and ears as he traveled the quiet country lanes, now somewhat lonely and deserted, in the gloom of approaching night.

It was nearly eight o'clock, and at half past eight there would be a train for New York—the only one until the express should pass through and pause for a few seconds, just before midnight. He gained nothing by going by this earlier train; but his anxiety to be alone—to read Mercy's letter to Steve, and think out his own plans for getting rid of him—had induced him to leave the cottage earlier than was really necessary. Besides, to talk to Mercy about Steve, to see her undisguised affection for another, became at last a torture past endurance; so that as soon as her letter was obtained he was glad to escape from it.

"How to get rid of Steve!" Over and over again he muttered the question without finding any reply. No business problem, in which interest, reputation, large sums of money, were involved, had ever interested or puzzled him half so much. A consciousness of this fact stole into his thoughts and startled him. What a strangely absorbing thing was this love—this madness, at which he had jeered so long? From somewhere in the dim past—in the far-away days of his boyhood—came a memory of some words that he had heard in a church one afternoon: "If a man should give all the riches of his house for love, they should be utterly condemned."

"True!" he muttered to himself, yet perfectly remem-

bering what nonsense he had thought them at the time. "It was true!"

He had not much hope of influencing Steve even by Mercy's letter. Steve's eyes, sharpened by love and jealousy, had penetrated his brother's secret. James had found it impossible to misunderstand the answer which his California proposal had received: "What! go away, and leave Mercy to you, brother? No, I guess not!" He had turned it off with a laugh at Steve's silly jealousy, but it had rankled deeply all the same.

"He will not go of his own free will," he muttered now. "He must be got rid of some way. Oh, how—how to get rid of Steve!"

The road by this time was semi-dark and very lonely. His footsteps echoed sharply on the frozen path, and the wind, shaking the branches of the trees on either side, filled the air with noises. Once or twice something like a stealthy, following footstep sounded near him, but gained from him, in the hurry and confused trouble of his thoughts, no more than a passing wonder. Once, indeed, when it sounded very plainly, he had glanced round, scarcely conscious why he did so or what he was looking for.

"No one there, of course!" he muttered, half aloud. "I half wish some spirit of evil would ride by me on the wind to-night. The devil himself would be welcome to me if he told me how to get rid of Steve!"

He spoke those last words aloud. In an instant, out of the surrounding darkness, came an answering voice, deep, low, and sinister:

"I can show you how to get rid of Steve, James Raymond!"

And, as he involuntarily started back, a man—a tall, swarthy, gypsy-looking fellow, with jet-black hair, and wearing a slouched hat drawn down over a pair of brill-

iantly piercing eyes—this man came out from the shadows of the trees and stood before him.

---

## CHAPTER XXX.

## A PLOT.

JAMES RAYMOND did not return to New York by the eight-o'clock train that evening. On the contrary, he accompanied his new acquaintance of the road to a lonely and dilapidated cottage built at the foot of a rocky hill, and situated in the very heart of the wild and lonely woods. And if it should appear improbable that a man who was ordinarily so practical and prudent should confide his own personal safety so rashly into a stranger's keeping, be it remembered that his usual good sense was warped by passion and jealousy, twin tormentors, whose sharp goads had lashed him into such a condition of desperate recklessness that he had lately wished for the appearance of even the Arch Enemy himself, if only his fiendship would rid him of his rival and help him to his heart's desire.

This his new acquaintance promised to do, the consideration being stated roughly thus: "One thousand dollars down when the game is bagged, and four thousand more upon your wedding-day." And to these terms, James, after a brief consideration, agreed, making one condition only, that "his blood must not be shed; neither in life nor limb must you really harm him; not even for Mercy's sake could I consent to that. Remember, no real harm to Steve."

No real harm, while all the time he was plotting to take from his brother all that, as even he himself now confessed, made life desirable! As if there were not far worse wounds and wrongs and harms than any injury to life or limb can compass!

“He sha’n’t be hurt,” said the man, abruptly. “And now understand that, after to-morrow’s over, the sooner it’s done the better. To-morrow I must have for preparations; after that, bring him whenever you like. Now, have you thought how you’re to get him to this place? He isn’t a dog or a baby, you know, to follow wherever you lead, without asking a question.”

But James confessed himself unprovided with any plausible lie that would be likely to tempt his brother into the trap that was being set for him.

“I must think of something, plan something”—he began, confusedly, when his companion interrupted him.

“Here’s your plan,” said he. “Can you imitate her writing? You’ve got a note from her for him; I saw it in your hand.”

James colored, remembering how he had kissed the note.

“Well, don’t give him that note; open it and practice a bit, and write him another, no matter how short, telling him to follow the bearer—that’ll be me—to this place to meet her. Day after to-morrow, when the noon train comes in, I’ll be in the woods by the road where I met you to-night. When I see you, I’ll step out and meet you. Soon as I get near, drop the note you’ve written on the ground behind you, careful not to let *him* see. Don’t even glance at it, and I’ll manage all the rest. You provide the letter, and we’ll get him here; and once here, he won’t get out again until I’ve earned the whole five thousand dollars. But mind, when you meet me, don’t look as if you’d ever seen me before; and for the world don’t speak until I speak to you first. And it would be as well to object to his following me; call me a rough fellow, and all that; he’ll think,” with a malicious laugh, “he’ll think that you’re holding him back from his beauty’s arms, and he’ll walk into the trap all the easier. And, see you—”

He suddenly arose from his seat, and going to a corner cupboard, brought three glasses out and laid them on the table.

“Just alike, ain’t they?” said he, with a most peculiar look, “only one has got just a little bit snipped about the edges. Now, mind you, when you come here with your brother, don’t drink out of the snipped glass! It won’t agree with you. Listen: when we get him into the cottage, Mercy ain’t here, of course. ‘She’s gone a little piece into the woods to see a poor, sick child,’ says I, explaining to him, ‘she didn’t like to wait here so long all alone—it’s a dull place, you see—so she went to Molly Green’s, and I’m to run and tell her you’re here, gentlemen. I’ll go now,’ and off I’m starting when you call me back, wanting to know if I can give you a drink of something before I go. ‘To be sure I can,’ says I, and I pour out three glasses of lager—will he drink lager?”—James nodded—“because, if not, it can be whatever you think he’ll take to best. And can’t you keep him with you to-morrow night, and give him something for breakfast that’ll make him thirsty? To be sure you can! Good enough! So I hand a glass to you, and this one to him, and one to myself, and I say, ‘here’s luck to us!’ And next minute the beer’s down and the job’s done, leastways the first and worst of it, and you pay me the one thousand dollars, and go your way, and see how quick you can persuade the girl to marry you.”

James had listened silently, his face gradually whitening until it assumed the ashen hue of death. He shrunk visibly from contact with his unscrupulous ally, but he made no objections to his villainous plans.

“If he should struggle, or call for help?” he suggested, nervously.

“If he did, nobody’d hear him,” answered the other, callously; “but he won’t make a move or a sound. I shall have the bird secure in his cage before he knows



enough to flutter. Afterward he may beat his wings till they break if he likes, but he won't get out till I open the door again. Do you want to see the cage?"

He arose as he spoke, without waiting for any answer, and dragged from its place against the back wall of the cottage or hut (a wall formed by the rock against which the rough habitation was built), a large and tall packing-box, made of pine planks roughly nailed together. Being removed, it left bare a large opening in the rock, evidently leading to a natural hollow or cave, as large, or larger, than the room in which they were sitting.

"There's where he'll bide until your wedding-day," said the ruffian, carelessly, and he prophesied more truly than he knew. "There's a sort of dim light comes from a small opening above and air enough to breathe, so he'll do finely." He pulled the chest back to its place again. "There!" said he, complacently. "The cage is a safe and strong one, and to-morrow I'll make the dose that's to lime the bird. Go you now and bring him here to drink it."

---

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### MORE PLOTTING.

AFTER taking part in such a conversation and such a compact, it is not, perhaps, very wonderful that James Raymond looked haggard and pale when he arrived in New York next morning; so much so indeed, that once or twice people turned and looked after him as he passed, almost questioning if it had been a living man or a ghost that had gone by them.

Arriving at his mother's door just as the letter-carrier reached it on his first morning round, that individual was so much startled by his ghastly pallor that he could not refrain from noticing it.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Raymond," said the postman, paus-

ing, letter in hand. "But you do look awful bad, to be sure. Is anything the matter, sir?"

"Nothing more than a tedious all-night journey which has tired me out," James answered, coolly. Then with a glance at the letter in the man's hand, at the same time holding out his own to take it: "For me, Smith?"

For there was always "a room kept for James" in his mother's house, and many of his letters were directed there.

But this missive was not for him, though the man made no demur about giving it into his keeping.

"For Mrs. Raymond, sir," he answered, at the same time putting the letter into James's hand. "If you're going in perhaps you'll take it. Nothing for any one else, sir, this morning."

And away he went upon his rounds again.

James glanced at the letter, and at the same moment laid his hand upon the bell; but he did not ring; on the contrary he started at sight of the handwriting of his mother's correspondent, and withdrawing his hand, stood for a few moments hesitating.

The letter was in Ada's hand. The question which it suggested to James's mind was this:

"Would it help me at all to know what she has to say? Can I make her useful to me?"

No scruple as to the dishonor of opening her letter deterred him. He had gone too far now in wish and actual intent to strain at such a gnat as this. There was very little risk about it.

His mother would probably never know such a letter had come, or indeed if he found it useless to himself and harmless to his plans, he might deliver it to her later. Was it worth while to take the trouble about it? After a moment's consideration he decided that it was.

"It may do some good, and it can't do harm," he

thought, as he quietly turned away from the house. "My talk with mother can wait."

For it was with the intention of talking his mother into consenting to Steve's departure for California that he had paused as he passed her door on the way to his hotel.

She might be got to approve of such a journey, on the score of its separating Mercy and Steve. At present James had his secret fears that the loving little mother, rather than part from her youngest and favorite child, might withdraw her objections to their union.

"But, after all, what's the use of her consent?" he mused, gloomily, as he strode along. "If my present plans succeed, Steve will be got out of the way more effectually, and no one's leave asked; only, how shall I account for his disappearance?—ay, that's the awkward part of it! There'll be a hue and cry after him. If some plausible excuse for his absence can not be devised, there'll be the very devil of a search for him!"

Reaching his hotel, and going at once to his room, he carefully opened Ada's letter. It proved to be very brief—merely announcing the writer's intended departure from New York, and bidding Mrs. Raymond farewell.

"Perhaps for years," wrote Ada—"certainly until I can forget my bitter disappointment and humiliation. God bless you, dear Mrs. Raymond. I do not tell you where we go, and I shall not write, for I wish to detach myself entirely from old associations for some time to come. When I can meet your son without a pang I shall return—not till then. Aunt goes with me. Before this reaches you, I shall have left New York."

This was all. James gasped for breath as he laid the letter down before him; it offered him a possible solution for the only serious difficulty that stood in the way of his villainous design.

"This letter must never reach my mother," he thought, rapidly. "Ada will appear to have left without a word,

and Steve disappears at the same time—will not the inference be that they went together? At any rate”—he drew a long, deep breath, and the look of resolution deepened in his face—“it shall go hard, but I contrive to make it appear so.”

The pallor of his face changed now to a hot flush of excitement. Why, this would do more than account for Steve’s disappearance—it would account for it in such a way as would arouse Mercy’s bitterest indignation against her seemingly unfaithful lover—it would drive her to his—James Raymond’s—arms!

He seized the letter in a resolute grasp, and cast a triumphant glance around him.

“I shall win!” he muttered—“I shall have her yet! Fate itself favors me!”

And in that moment, with the thought of success—of Mercy wedded to him, irrevocably his own, his wife—the last vestige of hesitation, of doubt, of pity for his brother passed from his heart.

Here was a way, not only of winning her, but of winning her quickly. His desire, which had hitherto been humble enough and content to wait, grew hotly impatient and eager.

The sooner Steve was removed and his perfidy made clear to her, the sooner would she revenge herself, and hide her humiliation by a wealthier marriage. Why, with this new aid which poor, unconscious Ada had given him, the whole plot might be perfected and brought to success almost at once.

“A month or so to convince her that she is forsaken; a letter or two from Steve to her, and from Ada to my mother, telling of their reconciliation and marriage—she’s not the girl I take her for if she doesn’t pluck up a spirit to resent that. Steve false to her—Steve married to another woman, and then I come in with wealth enough to lord it over her rival—with love enough to win her affec-

tion in the end. She'll marry me, and I'll take her to Europe, and keep her there until she loves me well enough to pardon the ruse by which I won her to her own welfare and happiness. It both can and shall be done, and I'll set about it at once. First of all, I'll write the note my fellow-conspirator needs to decoy Steve."

Without wasting any more time about the matter, he set to work at once upon his task of imitating Mercy's writing.

It was not so difficult as he had anticipated; the girl's scholastic training, as well as her resolute and decided character, giving her handwriting something of a masculine style, which he found it easy to copy.

"If it were an effeminate, broken-backed scrawl like that," he muttered, giving Ada's letter a contemptuous push as it lay before him, "I should never try to copy it at all, for it would be simply impossible to do it successfully."

This set him wondering how the desired letter from Ada, telling of her marriage, was to be manufactured for Mercy's deception. But the problem did not puzzle him very long.

Evil plots and plans suggested themselves to his mind as rapidly as if the master of all evil had stood in person at his elbow, whispering them into his willing ear.

"We'll do without any letter from Ada. A telegram will do," he resolved. "A telegram from Steve."

Poor Mercy's real letter hidden carefully away, and the forged one completed to his satisfaction, he turned his attention to his own personal needs, and took a bath and breakfast, and made some change in his disordered dress.

All this he did methodically and deliberately, and without any thought or sense of comfort or satisfaction in it.

He felt the steadier and better when it was done, however, though the deathly pallor had returned to his face and remained there.



By this time it was noon. He had had no sleep, and felt no want of any, and there was yet much to be done.

He went to the bank, and having drawn out one thousand dollars in notes, made them into a small packet and put them into an inner pocket. Then he went quietly to his own store, where he knew he should find Steve.

The two brothers were friendly enough, thanks to the policy of the elder, in spite of Steve's incipient jealousy.

But James had, as yet, said nothing to any one about his journey.

Therefore Steve's surprise was very great when, calling him aside, James said:

"I saw Mercy yesterday. Her mother wrote to me concerning a business matter, and I thought it best to advise her in person. I have a message to you from her, and have much to say to you. But we can't talk here. After business come home with me to my hotel, where we can be undisturbed. I promised Mercy to help you both, and I will do so if possible."

And he passed on to his private office, leaving Steve surprised and wondering.

Uncomfortably surprised, and uneasily wondering, for to his mind, having no reason to believe Mrs. Craven his friend, this secret correspondence and secret visit on his brother's part had in it something underhanded and strange, and set him vaguely doubting.

---

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### INSNARED!

THESE doubts James soon contrived to set at rest, however, and even to convince Steve of his sincerity and good intention.

"You're inclined to doubt me, Steve, because you can see that I admired the girl you love. My boy, that was before I knew that you loved her, and when I supposed

her free to be wooed by me as by any man. When she tells me, as she has told me, that her heart is yours, I retire from the field with what grace I may, and honestly wish to do what I can toward securing her happiness. She trusts me; why should not you? Come, come! Believe me your best friend. And let us go like friends together to-morrow and talk the situation over."

So it was arranged that Steve should remain with James at his hotel for the night, in order to start off early in the morning.

"She expects us to arrive by the train that gets in at noon," said James. "I won't be in the way, my dear boy, I'll talk to the mother. I told Mercy of the California project, and you'll talk the matter over with her. I have promised her that anything she suggests to be done for you I will do, if it lies within the bounds of possibility."

It sounded plausible enough. Steve, being young and honest, believed and thanked his brother, and while with him and under his influence, trusted him entirely; but strangely enough, no sooner did he, having retired to rest, find himself alone, than the old vague, unreasoning, uncomfortable doubt returned upon his mind in full force again.

It made him angry with himself. A doubt that had absolutely no foundation, and was so very shadowy and unreal that it had actually nothing tangible to be afraid of seemed childish, puerile, despicable. Steve shook himself impatiently, as if he would have shaken the premonition of coming evil, which seemed to him a cowardly and whimsical fancy only, out of his brain.

"What the deuce have I to be afraid of?" he asked himself. "James talks fairly enough; and he isn't going to Mercy alone, but asks me to come with him. If I could suspect my own brother of any villainy, even the fact that he chooses broad daylight for our visit, when he could just

as well have gone to-night, makes the ridiculous idea doubly ridiculous. Pshaw! I'm ashamed of myself. I'm worse than a nervous woman. I'm a fool!"

The very mention of "a nervous woman" caused him to remember that his mother would wonder at his absence. True, James had assured him that he had seen her in the morning, and had told her that Steve would be with him.

"I might write her a few lines all the same, to tell her I'm going out of town," he mused; with that restless desire upon him to be doing something that was natural to his nervous mood. "She would get it by breakfast-time to-morrow."

So he sat down and wrote a note to Mrs. Raymond, and rang his bell for the night porter to mail it.

James, restless also, and afraid to lie down until certain that his intended victim was asleep, was in the office when the man brought the letter down.

"Here," he said, instantly. "Give it to me, George, I'm going out and will post it."

And he actually did go out and walk around the block, returning presently with Steve's letter in his pocket.

In his own room he opened it. It contained only a few loving words; but now not even consideration for the anxious anguish he was preparing for the little mother's heart could induce him to pause.

He put the letter into the fire.

"One danger escaped," he muttered to himself. "It was well that I watched him."

Meantime Steve, more contented for having written his useless letter, fell asleep.

It was James who awoke him, as early as five o'clock, standing beside his bed.

"The train starts at seven," he said, with a smile on his ghastly face—so ghastly that Steve stared at him with positive dismay, and cried out, impulsively:

“Good God, James! what’s the matter?—what makes you look so pale?”

“I haven’t slept,” James answered, hurriedly. “I’m not well. But don’t mind me,” he added, quietly; “I shall be better presently, when we get into the air. You must make haste, though. I’ve ordered breakfast—such as we can get at this early hour—for both of us.”

The breakfast was well enough, Steve thought. There was fish, both smoke-cured and salted, and ham and eggs, fried, but the ham was of the saltiest, certainly.

“It’s rather thirsty fare,” said Steve, who was in high spirits by this time. “That’s the only fault I find with it!”

James gave him a very peculiar look indeed.

“Fortunately we can get all we want to drink upon the road,” said he, with another of his ghastly smiles.

They did not do so, however. Only once did they stop for a glass of beer, though Steve anticipated slaking his thirst when they should reach the depot. In this he was disappointed by James, who proposed that they should leave the train when it stopped for a few moments at a cutting about half a mile below the station.

“It leads to a much shorter cut,” said he, jumping from the car as he spoke; and Steve, who knew nothing of the place, followed him without any argument.

By these means James secured to himself the immense advantage of avoiding the depot, where somebody or other would have been sure to notice him and Steve together, and might have come forward to state the fact, afterward, to his confusion.

They struck out for the lonely lane, James taking the lead, and Steve following contentedly.

“You seem quite at home with the road,” said Steve; but he said it without suspicion, for daylight had dispelled his doubts.

James answered, quietly:

"I can always find my way anywhere; it's a sort of gift with me. And I've been this way twice, you know. It's a short cut, you'll find, that I'm taking you."

Steve never questioned it. Happy in the thought that he should soon see his beloved, his heart was too light and gay to harbor the dark guest Suspicion, else he might have wondered at James's nervous manner and watchful, roving eyes, as well as at the start he made when a rough-looking fellow came suddenly out of the woods into the road just ahead of them, and stared inquisitively into their faces as he passed them by.

But Steve noticed nothing of this. Still less did he see that James's hand had softly and secretly dropped a note upon the ground behind them, and that the man came to it and picked it up as soon as he had passed them by.

Next moment they heard him calling to them, and turning to ascertain the cause, saw him coming back, speaking as he came.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," said the man, brusquely, "but is either of you named Raymond?"

"Both," answered James, as brusquely, and his very lips were white.

"Steve Raymond is the man I want," said the stranger, who held a letter in his hand. "I've got this letter for him."

And he held it out.

"It is for me," said Steve, and took it from him. "Why, James!" he cried, as he began to read. "It is from Mercy!"

The letter was as follows:

"MY DEAR STEVE,—The bearer will show you the way to his cottage, where I am waiting for you. I have had some words with my mother, and want to see you here. Will explain when we meet. Your own

"MERCY."



Steve received it without a doubt or question.

"We must do as she wishes, of course," he said, as he handed the letter to James.

And at that moment his brother's singular pallor again forced itself upon his attention.

"I never saw anybody as pale as you are, James," said he; "you can't be well, I'm certain."

James had been silently reading the note—he now looked up with a stern, white face.

"Never mind me," he said, with a gravity of look and tone that seemed to poor Steve quite too serious for the occasion. "Think of yourself. Are you going to obey this summons? Believe me, the wisest way is to go to Mrs. Craven's cottage. If Mercy be not there you can then go and seek her. I—I—I don't like the looks of that fellow," he added, lowering his tone as he glanced at the man, who stood quietly waiting. "Steve, if you're wise, if you'll take my advice, you won't go with him."

But Steve stared at him with indignant surprise.

"Not go where my sweetheart calls me!" he cried. "Why, you must be crazy! Mercy has a spirit, I can assure you—you are actually counseling me to give her offense, and that's no friendly counsel!"

And a new phase of last night's doubt and suspicion flashed suddenly from his eyes.

"Go to Mrs. Craven's cottage yourself if you like," said he, "I go to Mercy. Here!" he called to the messenger. "Lead the way, I'm ready!"

James came sullenly to his side. He spoke now without lifting his eyes to his brother's face.

The man who had been standing, silent and unconcerned, moved toward the wood again.

"I'll go with you," said James, in a strange, suppressed voice. "I have my doubts about this man, and I think it right to tell you so, but I'll go with you. If you

ever see cause to regret not taking my warning, don't blame me for it."

"Oh, I sha'n't blame you!" answered Steve, scornfully. "Though how you can warn me about what you don't understand, I can't see! Come or go, as you please, however, I shall go to Mercy. Is that the way?" he added, to the supposed messenger.

"This is the way. It ain't far," answered the man; "right ahead of us."

And he pushed his way through the trees, into the thick woods.

The two brothers, sullen and silent now, and walking a little apart, followed him.

The victim had fallen into the snare, and was going to his doom!

---

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

"SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH STEVE."

THE hue and cry after Steve, which James had rightly anticipated, began very shortly after his departure, when Mrs. Raymond, coming down to breakfast, was informed by her servant that "Mr. Stephen hadn't been home all night; at least, any ways his bed hadn't been slept in." The little mother took alarm at once, for Steve had always been steady and regular, and she well knew that, although there was a certain coolness between them on account of Mercy Craven, he was much too thoughtful and affectionate to cause her any uneasiness, or deliberately leave her in suspense as to his movements.

"Something is wrong," spoke up the maternal instinct in her heart. "Something is wrong with Stephen."

So strong was this foreboding that it was with difficulty she forced herself to wait patiently until ten o'clock before going out to make inquiries concerning him. "If all's well, he will send me some message on his way to the

store," she thought. But no message came, so to the store she went in search of him.

What she heard here somewhat allayed her fears. Mr. Raymond and Mr. Stephen Raymond had left the store together on the previous evening, and one of the clerks had seen them get into a street car. Neither had since been seen, and the obvious inference was that they were still together. The mother, who knew of no cause for ill-feeling between her sons, felt satisfied.

"Surely Steve must be all right," she thought, "since James is with him."

As her anxiety abated and faded, a sense of annoyance and indignation took its place. That Steve, her idolized boy, to whom she had so devoted herself, should be thus inconsiderate and unmindful of her feelings, hurt her very much. There was even a little touch of jealousy in her wound. Hitherto she had been first of all with Steve, whose light liking for Ada had been neither strong enough nor deep enough to supplant her influence. Now all was changed. He had declared himself ready to sacrifice her and all the world for this hateful girl, for this Mercy's sake. No doubt it was Mercy's influence which she had now to thank for his absence and the anxiety it had caused her. Her resentment grew against him. By the time she reached home she had resolved, being reassured by the intelligence that he was with James, to wait quietly until he should think proper to return, and meantime to think no more about him.

She kept in this mind, starting nervously at every ring, and listening to every footfall, until four o'clock in the afternoon, and then, the need of sympathy being strong upon her, she suddenly remembered that she had seen nothing of Ada since that unlucky afternoon which had brought disappointment to both. Ada had come straight to her then from Polly's house; but since then, although she had written to the girl, expressing her desire to call

upon her, she had neither seen her nor received an answering line. "Which is almost as strange as Steve's absence is," mused Mrs. Raymond, uneasily. "I'll go now and call upon her."

It was easier said than done, however. Ada's house (it was her own) had a forlorn and deserted look that warned the visitor what to expect, even before the door was opened.

This office was performed by a woman, quite strange to Mrs. Raymond, who stated that the family had gone away, and she didn't know when they would be back again.

She didn't know anything, apparently. The few natural questions which Mrs. Raymond, in her first bewilderment, was constrained to put, received only the vaguest answers.

She didn't know the ladies herself, she said. Miss West's solicitor and man of business had got her the job to take care of the house, and he paid her by the month, and that was all she knew about it. When did Miss West go? She believed yesterday, but she was gone before she came there. Did any one accompany Miss West—her aunt, for instance? She couldn't answer that; she knew nothing at all about it.

The little mother turned away with a fresh wound in her affectionate heart. She had loved Ada, and this departure, without one good-bye word, hurt her deeply.

"For what wrong had I done to her?" she reasoned. "She knew that to have her for a daughter was the wish of my heart—that my disappointment was scarcely less than her own; and to treat me so unkindly and disrespectfully—Mercy Craven herself could scarcely treat me worse! I sha'n't forget it easily."

And she turned homeward again disconsolate.

She might have gone to Ada's solicitor for information, but her pride revolted against that; nor would it indeed have been of any use, since he had received instructions

from his client to give no clew whatever as to her whereabouts.

Thus far the fates seemed to have worked in James's favor. He needed some assistance of the kind, for the difficulties of the task he had undertaken only began to show themselves in their true magnitude when he had taken that desperate first step which admitted of no recall, and committed himself to a course from which there could now be no turning back, and upon which one single false step might mean ruin!

To get Steve out of the way had seemed to him the one great difficulty; but, now that that most desirable end was attained, other difficulties, compared to which this one appeared trifling, sprung up on every side of him, and hemmed him in and harassed him until they almost maddened him. As he sat in the fast express train for New York on that fatal afternoon that proved so calamitous to poor Steve, he looked back, in imagination, to his young brother, ensnared and betrayed; and, even while he shuddered at the picture memory drew, he almost felt that, of their two predicaments, his own was far the worst, and that he would have willingly changed places.

"Oh, to have him sitting here beside me, as he did this morning!" he sighed. "This torture of doubt and fear and possible discovery will hang about me every day, and drive me mad at last! It is too much to suffer, even for Mercy's sake. I have acted too hastily—I should have taken more time, matured my plans, prepared the way for this disappearance. There are so many things that might have been done had I taken time to think the matter out. Surely it had better not have been done at all than done so carelessly—especially when failure and discovery mean ruin—disgrace--ay"—he turned hot and cold, white and red, as he thought what that disgrace would be—"ay, death! for I could never face the scandal, nor bear to see him return and win her, after all. If I



succeed it will be nothing—a joke on Steve; rather a mean one, perhaps the world will say; but then ‘all stratagems are fair in love and war.’ I’ll make amends to him—set him up in business, and enable him to marry some other girl. Mercy—ah, I dread her the most!”—he actually trembled at the thought of her—“but she shall not know the truth until she is my loving wife—perhaps a mother also—and, besides, female vanity will plead for me—no woman living but would be flattered by such a proof of love. Oh, it will be all right if I succeed; but failure—there’s no use in shirking the truth now—failure means ruin, disgrace, and death!”

Such musings occupied him until the train reached Philadelphia, where it stopped for ten minutes. He roused himself, and hurrying to the telegraph-office he sent a message to Mrs. Raymond, which purported to come from Ada West. He used her initials only, so as to avoid attracting any attention, of which indeed at that busy place, and amid the confusion and bustle attendant upon the arrival of the express, there was but little danger.

“If she hasn’t raised the hue and cry already,” he thought, “that’ll keep her quiet until I can see her. And I must go to her armed with a letter from Steve. I must have rest before I write it, though—rest and sleep. I feel as though my brain was going wild.”

It was now nearly seven o’clock. The train went dashing and rattling on again to its destination, bearing James to rest, and sleep, and forgery. And faster than any train that ever traveled went the false and lying message that was to quiet and soothe the anxious little mother, and prevent her raising a hue and cry after Steve.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

“ARE THEY MARRIED?”

It did more than quiet her—it delighted her. It made amends for Ada’s supposed neglect, as well as Steve’s, and foreshadowed the fulfillment of the cherished wish which of late she had almost despaired of. For this is what the lying message said, coming from A. W., Philadelphia, to Mrs. Raymond, New York:

“By this you have received Steve’s letter. We will write soon and send you our address. Tell no one. I could not rest until you shared my happiness, but speak of us to none except James.

“Your loving children,

“A. and S.”

It reached Mrs. Raymond shortly after seven o’clock, by which time her anxiety and suspense had grown almost unendurable. The relief it brought her was so immense that the implied joy escaped her just at the first glance, and came upon her presently like a thunder-clap of delicious surprise and gladness.

“But I can’t make out whether they are actually married or not,” she said to James, when he called next day. (She had sat up till twelve in the hope that he would come on the night of the message, but had gone to sleep at last, quite happy in its false news.) “You see, it says ‘from A. W.,’ and if they were married she should sign ‘A. R.’ But Steve’s letter to you seems positive enough.”

And she began to read it for the twentieth time aloud and thoughtfully:

“DEAR JAMES,—I am not going on, as you suppose. I can not face poor Mercy. Besides, I have to meet, at Philadelphia, one who has, or very soon will have, a better

claim on me. So I leave the train, and mail this here. I intend writing to my mother shortly, but meantime you can explain the change in my views both to her and Mercy. Mother will approve, of course, but Mercy—I hope you will say all that’s kind to the poor girl. Tell her there was really no chance for us, and some day she will see that this is for the best. I hope she will not take it much to heart. After all, it is no worse for her than it was for Ada, and I am sure she will yet do very much better than in marrying me. Say and do the very best you can, old fellow, for

Yours,  
STEVE.”

So willing is human nature to believe that which it wishes to find true that this heartless, selfish, unmanly letter—wholly unlike the character of frank, loving, generous Steve—appeared to his own mother so satisfactory that she was completely deceived by it. As for the mere matter of handwriting, James had been successful enough, there being naturally a strong resemblance between the handwriting of the brothers—a circumstance quite as common and noticeable in families as resemblances of feature or voice. It had been easy for James to imitate any little peculiarities of Steve’s, with which long association had made him familiar. The forgery was a skillful one, so far as the mechanical portion of the work, but the sentiment and tone would have been impossible to Steve’s nature. This, however, his own mother, blinded by her eagerness to see her cherished hopes fulfilled, quite failed to notice.

“You really think they were married, then, before the message was sent?” she asked. “In spite of these initials?”

“The initials may have been used as a blind in case of being seen by any one but yourself,” James answered. “Steve told me they intended to be married immediately, and go away, perhaps for a year or two. He has the grace to be somewhat ashamed of the manner in which he

treated both these girls. And Ada is, I fancy, a little ashamed of having forgiven him so easily, and married him after all. Steve's idea seemed to be to get out of all the responsibility and bother, leave me to adjust matters with Mercy Craven, and himself remain abroad until the scandal of his conduct had blown over. This he confided to me after business the day before yesterday, and urged me to go to Mercy at once, and tell her of the change in his feelings. I declined, of course, and moreover insisted that he should act in a straightforward manner toward the girl by going to her himself, although I was willing to accompany him. I must confess that I had my doubts of him, even when at last he promised that he would do this, and for that reason, though on the pretext of being in time for an early train, I kept him with me all night. His arrangements to meet Ada at Philadelphia must have been already made, even while he was promising me to see Mercy, and his pretense of accompanying me was a deliberate deception. He gave me the slip at Philadelphia, and while I was hunting about for him a boy placed this letter in my hand. This is all I know, mother, and I must say that, so far as our cousin Mercy is concerned, it is a most painful affair, and I could heartily wish that the poor girl had never seen Steve, nor—nor any one of us."

He uttered that regret with all his heart. Oh, that he had never seen her, this one woman of all the world whom it was his wretched fate to love!

Oh, that her beauty had never dazzled his eyes and maddened his brain, and changed him from a fairly honest, plodding, commonplace man into a base conspirator against his own brother's peace; a vile thief who sought to rob a woman of her love, her hopes, her very self; a criminal whom the law could punish! Oh, to be honest, clean of hand, and cold of heart once more! Oh, that he had never seen her!

His mother's smiling complacency, her joy in this ad-

vantageous marriage for her favorite child, and her scarcely concealed indifference to Mercy's wrongs and Mercy's sufferings—wrongs and sufferings caused by him—provoked him beyond endurance. He took his leave in haste, fearful of betraying his own secret if he stayed longer.

"You must not wonder if I do not quite share your delight," he said to her at parting. "On me devolves the task of telling this girl how her trust has been betrayed, and I confess that I shrink from it. Be as happy as you like, mother, but keep the matter strictly to yourself; do not even tell Polly until we hear further from Ada or Steve. That is Ada's wish, you know. You will certainly hear again from them in a few weeks at furthest."

And so he left her—having secured to himself these "few weeks" of silent waiting, wherein to prosecute his plans and lay siege to Mercy. He took with him the false telegram and forged letter.

"These must convince her," he muttered to himself, as he went home late in the afternoon. "To-night for rest, and then to-morrow to take these to Mercy. I have gone too far now to turn back. Whither will it lead me, I wonder, this crooked, evil road, on which I have set my feet, and on which I will walk steadily to the end for Mercy's sake?"

---

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### ACCEPTED.

It was Friday, the fourth day since that on which Mercy had intrusted to James that note to Steve, in which she had counseled him to accept his brother's Californian proposals, but to come first to her and talk the matter over. Four days and no answer from her lover; no, not so much as a single line.

The girl had been by turns surprised, indignant, puzzled, anxious, and alarmed, by this strange silence, all the



more hard to bear because she had no one in whom she could confide, but on the contrary was sensible of a certain air of satisfaction and complacency in her mother's manner, which undoubtedly had its origin in Steve's apparent neglect.

She would not utter her anxieties, which might have seemed complaints, to one who was so ready to think ill of him, and who, by putting the worst interpretation upon his silence, would only add to her fears and cares. Neither would she humble herself to own that she had fears. But each day as the postman passed by the cottage door her eyes grew more anxious and her face more pale; and when at last, on Friday afternoon, James arrived suddenly, she flew with a scream of joy to meet him, so relieved, so thankful, that her warm cry of "Oh, welcome! welcome, cousin!" had very nearly been instead a fervent "Oh, thank God!"

James was agitated and nervous, and very, very pale.

She noticed that the instant her eyes fell on him.

In the same instant he noticed that those beautiful dark eyes had merely glanced at him, and then passed him by, looking eagerly for some one else to follow behind him.

He sighed and shook his head. His whole air and manner was so grave, so sad, so depressed that Mercy's gladness changed to sudden fear; and even Jane Craven, who had placed a chair for him, had taken his hat and coat, asked, anxiously:

"What is the matter? What is wrong?"

He answered Mercy's eyes, not her mother's words.

"I am quite alone," he said, with a peculiar emphasis, "quite alone." Then passing his hand over his brow with an anxious, distressful gesture, "You would not have welcomed me so warmly if you had known that—you would not have welcomed me at all, had you guessed my errand. This task has been forced upon me, and I know what awaits the messenger who brings bad news."

“Bad news?”

It was Mercy who repeated the words, in a low, startled tone. No one else spoke. Then she brought a chair and sat beside him.

“Tell me the truth,” she said, earnestly, “has anything happened to Steve? Is he—is he—ill, cousin?”

James raised his eyes to her—only for a second—but she saw such pity in his glance that her heart sickened with foreboding pain.

“Oh, speak!” she cried, clasping her hands in agony, “oh, speak!”

James began hastily:

“He is not ill! No, no! Don’t look so frightened, he is well enough.”

He paused, and then went on again, turning to Mrs. Craven first, with a sort of appeal, as if asking her to be his witness.

“I swear to you both,” he said, earnestly, “that I shall suffer all the pain I must inflict by what I am obliged to say. I declare to you both—I may make such a declaration now without dishonor—that I dearly and truly love my cousin Mercy here, and would do anything to secure her happiness or spare her pain. When I saw that her heart was set on Steve, I gave up my own hopes instantly. She knows it. When he came to me the other night and confessed to me his own villainy, and asked me to tell her that which she is now about to learn, I refused to be the messenger of grief to her, and insisted on his coming in person. But he evaded me, and left me this letter.”

He held up the letter and telegram before the eyes of the bewildered girl.

“This telegram my mother received. It completes the story of the letter, Mercy, and I must either give them to you or leave you in cruel suspense.”

He placed them in the trembling hands which she held out to him.

"Oh, my dear!" he said, with a tenderness of tone that James Raymond's voice had never known before, "forgive me for thus wounding you! He was never worthy of such a heart as yours."

And as he turned away there were real tears in his eyes, called there by the pity he felt for the wound his own hand had dealt, and would not refrain from dealing.

Mercy read both letter and telegram in silence once, twice, thrice.

What she felt, thought, endured, found no expression in words, while to her very lips she was so white that all the life in her seemed concentrated in her glowing eyes, as she handed the lying papers to her mother, and said, very quietly, and almost in her usual tone:

"Steve has married Ada."

But Jane Craven did not take it so quietly. The insolent tone of pity of the letter aroused her to indignant rage.

"The presumptuous fool!" she cried, angrily. "The 'poor girl,' he calls you. Ay, poor indeed, when you set no higher value on yourself than give yourself to him! He 'hopes you will not take it much to heart,' too, and James here is to 'comfort you!' Congratulate you on your escape, would be more in order! And he hopes you will 'do better than marry him!' You couldn't well do worse, any way! Oh, Mercy, what a fool you have been! For this you have thrown away so many better chances, to be slighted, insulted, jilted like this! Who do you think will want you now?" She flung the letter from her as if she was throwing Mercy's hopes and chances all away with it. "Why, no one! No man wants another man's cast-off shoes! No man!"

But here James put in an eager word, standing before Mercy, who had risen, lashed out of her apathy by the

sting of her mother's tongue, and was about to leave the room.

“Don't go, dear cousin, until you hear me!” he cried, earnestly. “Mrs. Craven, I want your daughter! Is she less charming, less desirable and dear because my brother is a fool? I adore her! Myself, my fortune, all I have and am, I offer for her acceptance. If she will take me she shall learn what true love is, and how much it can do to make her happy. Her wish shall be my law, and to see her happy my delight, if she will only have me! But I don't expect or dare to hope that she will,” he added, humbly. “Nevertheless, I make the offer just the same, if only to remove from the woman I love the reproach you have just uttered, that no man wants her. When any one says that Steve Raymond jilted her, answer them that James Raymond laid himself and his fortune at her feet, and that she rejected him!”

Suddenly Mercy held out to him her hand. There was a strange smile on her pale lips and a strange light in her eyes.

“Why should we say that she rejected him?” she asked, just as quietly as she had spoken to her mother. “Should you not like her to accept him, cousin?”

He fell back from her as if the words had been a blow. He gasped as if the very thought had taken his breath away.

“Impossible!” he stammered. “You will not! You are mocking me!”

“No, indeed,” she answered, with the same strange, pale calm upon her, “I am very much in earnest, Cousin James. Steve is married, and I am not the girl to wear the willow for a false love, believe me. You say you desire me for your wife. If you are in earnest—if you are not mocking me—”

“Oh, Mercy!” He sprung forward, there was no mis-

taking his eyes; she shuddered and shrunk from him just a little. "Oh, my dear, I love you!"

She hesitated for an instant only. Jane Craven watched and listened breathlessly, but forbore to speak. Mercy held out her hand to James once more.

"Then my hand is yours," she said. "I accept your offer, cousin. I will be your wife."

He kissed her hand.

"Soon, Mercy? Will you wed me soon?" he asked.

And she answered, listlessly:

"As soon as you please."

---

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

"REVENGE IS SWEET."

SURELY never before did success smile so fairly upon guilty plotting or rush so instantly to meet it. James Raymond, however, could hardly have looked paler, or been more stunned, had his good fortune been a grisly ghost, that, rising up before him unawares, had frightened all the life and color out of him.

Jane Craven gazed in wonder at his white, stern, haggard face, and even Mercy, through all her mad, though hidden, passion of rage, revenge, and grief, was sensible of a faint and fleeting sensation of surprise at her accepted lover's strange emotion.

"He looks like a man who has received his death-warrant, rather than one who has just been promised the hand of the woman he loves!" was the thought that passed listlessly through her mind; and although the idea made no strong or enduring impression upon her at the time, it recurred to her with vivid force and clearer comprehension afterward.

"I'll marry you when you please," she had said, with cold and listless indifference that might have wounded him, had he not been too glad of the consent to quarrel



with the manner of it; but when he would have kissed the hand she gave, it was withdrawn, and, when seeing her about to leave him, he would have detained her, and urged her to name some definite and early day, she only answered coldly:

“Do not detain me now; settle it with my mother, Cousin James. I will abide by her decision, and keep my word to you; but let me go now, I beg of you.”

And he, knowing himself a guilty criminal and her wronger—forced, even in this moment of success, to look forward with dread to the certain retribution of the future—he did not dare to oppose her wishes by a look or word, but bowed his head, and stood aside to let her pass, in silence.

As a fact, the success which had followed upon his vile schemes had been so sudden and so complete that it actually stunned him.

He had been prepared for waiting and delay; for tedious scheming to keep up appearances; for endless plotting to perfect and carry out the villainy which had seemed only begun.

His mother, satisfied at present, must be kept so—perhaps for months; Steve, safely disposed of for the moment, must be watched and guarded, lest, at any time, his escape and reappearance on the scene should ruin all. Mercy herself must be managed with the utmost care—convinced of Steve’s perfidy; weaned gradually from her love for him; persuaded—perhaps only with tedious difficulty—into this new and more advantageous marriage—it would all be the task of anxious, weary, torturing months, he had thought, and lo! an hour had perfected the hardest part of the work! Mercy had believed him at once—torn her false lover from her heart and life, and given him, James, the desire of his heart and the reward of his wickedness in the promise, “I’ll marry you when you please.”

When he pleased—why, of course that would be im-

mediately—not exactly to-day or to-morrow, perhaps—something in the look, in the involuntary shudder of the bride-elect, warned him that she would hardly tolerate being taken quite so literally at her word; but in a few days, perhaps, or a week or two at furthest. Why, they could be on their way to Europe and Steve at liberty before Mrs. Raymond's suspicions began to awake—before, by any possibility, that other danger—the danger of Ada's hearing of her supposed marriage and contradicting the report—could come to ruin him. As he realized how favorable all his prospects seemed, the ghastly pallor of his face warmed into something more like living color, and its haggard, stern expression changed to one of expectant hope, as he turned toward Jane Craven.

She had been watching him in silence. No change of his face had escaped her. She had seen the shock of his surprise—the powerful secret terror that in the first moment killed his joy—the shrinking fear of Mercy, the hope and confidence that gradually grew out of his silent train of thought and chased his doubts away. The result of this scrutiny was that she mastered so much of his secret as the knowledge that he had a secret, and even made a shrewd guess, though wide of the mark, as to its nature.

“He is hiding something—something of which he is afraid,” she thought. “But he loves Mercy. Is he deceiving us for his own purposes? Has he brought about Steve's sudden marriage? For most certainly he loves Mercy. Ay, so much that I think I can make what terms with him I please before I consent to let him marry her.”

So she concealed her real delight at the proposed arrangement, and met his advances so coolly, though kindly, too, that James took alarm, and began to fear that the road to guilty happiness lay not quite so clear and smooth before him as he had flattered himself, after all.

“Mercy is an impulsive girl,” said Mrs. Craven, gravely, “and smarting—you must remember, James—under

the sting of this base desertion. It would be wise, for both your sakes, to give her time to consider."

"And to change her mind!" cried James, bitterly. In his secret soul he added: "And to find out what I have done!"

A terror seized him. Under its influence he pleaded his cause to Jane far more warmly than he could have done to her daughter.

"Let me marry her at once," he cried, "and take her far away before the story gets known. I will surround her with luxury and pleasure—take her abroad—make any settlement you think proper—"

Jane took him up at that.

"You know we are poor," she said, "and yet you urge immediate marriage. My daughter can not enter your family quite unprepared. Even if we were rich, some time—a month, perhaps—must be devoted to her wardrobe, for instance. Being poor, I shall require about six months to make her fit for—"

She got no further. Want of money was an obstacle to his happiness which James could easily remove. And he lost no time in doing so.

"I will place five thousand dollars to your credit in any bank you please," he said, eagerly, "as soon as I get home. If that is not enough, say what you require. Only say that I shall marry her within the month, Aunt Cra-ven, for Heaven's sake!"

His earnestness, as well as his generosity, touched her. The amount he named would do, she said, and she would have it banked in Philadelphia, and take Mercy there at once to make her purchases. Perhaps, she suggested, the wedding might as well take place there also, a proposal to which James assented at once.

But when Mercy came to be consulted on this point, they found they had been reckoning without their host.

She refused to go to Philadelphia at all, or to take any part in the preparations her mother deemed necessary.

"I am very well as I am," she said, coldly, "and James has liked me as I am. If he wishes me different it will be time enough for me to change when I am his wife. I will stay here until I am married, and be married here. As for wedding-dress, outfit, and all that, I don't see the necessity at all; but if you do, mother, all I can say is, you must select them entirely yourself; I will not be troubled about them."

James saw in this answer a disposition to repent of the engagement she had so rashly made, perhaps even a desire to find a pretext for quarreling with him and breaking it.

He was too clever to give her any such excuse, and only answered, soothingly:

"I wish no change in you, dearest Mercy. You are perfection in my eyes. I shall be only too glad if you will dispense altogether with these preparations which, your mother says, will occupy a whole long month, and marry me without any delay whatever. Why could we not be married very quietly indeed, next week?"

But on this Mercy instantly went over to her mother's side, and declared that such haste, without any reason, would be scarcely decent.

"And my mother knows best, of course," she said, wearily, "and some preparations are necessary. Surely a month is a very short time to make them in! However—so that I am not annoyed in the meantime, let it be just as she says."

For, even while she shrunk from the thought of this marriage, she welcomed it as a method of revenge.

Steve would learn that she had soon replaced him. Ada would not triumph over a broken-hearted and defeated rival.

On the contrary, she resolved:

"I will defeat her yet! James shall take me where they

are, and when my beauty has such a setting as wealth can give, it shall go hard if I don't outshine this pink-and-white piece of prettiness, and make Steve repent his bargain! She has taken my lover from me. Let her look out that I don't make her husband pay! They have robbed me of happiness, but revenge remains, at least, and I will have it!"

Such was the unworthy motive that had led the deceived, unhappy girl to consent so rashly to a hateful marriage; such was the sole hope that Mercy saw in the future that lay beyond her wedding-day.

---

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### AWAKING.

AND in the meantime, while James exulted in the success of his plans, and Mrs. Raymond rejoiced over her son's supposed marriage; while Mercy rashly credited a lying story, and madly seeking revenge for slighted love, prepared for herself a life of misery—what had become of Steve?

The place in which he found himself lying, when at last a kind of consciousness broke through the stupor that enchaind his senses and lay upon his limbs like lead, was a kind of cave.

Small in its general dimensions, and unevenly shaped, but very lofty, and having a hole, or narrow slit at the very top, through which he could see the shining stars.

He lay and looked at them a long time before he understood that they were stars, or that the place wherein he was lying was a cave, or that this helpless figure—bound at the wrists and ankles, and prostrate on a couch of skins and straw—was he, himself, Steve Raymond.

And when at last his slowly reviving consciousness had tediously crept and toiled, as it were, from one of those facts to the other, until it gradually mastered them all,



and he grew certain of his own identity, and could say to himself—very brokenly and low, and with great difficulty, because of a curious dryness of his mouth and swelling of his tongue—"This is Steve Raymond, bound, and lying in a cave." Even then his utmost efforts failed to pierce or drive away the thick mist that enshrouded his memory, or help him to any rational explanation of how and why he came to be there.

While he lay—very quiet and still in body, but sorely struggling and darkly groping through the mazes of this mystery in mind—his eyes, leaving the shining stars and roving round the stone walls of his prison, encountered the dark face of a man.

It gave him a strong and sudden shock. Some secret chord of memory was touched, and vibrated with a thrill of horror. Who was this man? Where had he seen him? As these questions formed themselves slowly in his dull and clouded brain there came with them a strange, wholly instinctive impulse to spring at the man and hurl him to the ground, and denounce him as a murderer and a villain. The words "You villain," trembled on his lips, and his bound and helpless form made one passionate effort to rise, when the man's hand—laid firmly on his chest—forced him back, and the man's voice, sounding in his ears as if it came from a great distance off, said to him, "Are you thirsty?"

He was thirsty. So thirsty that his mouth burned like fire, and his tongue felt all swollen, and too large for it. At sight of the drink which the man offered him this sore physical need overpowered all other thoughts and feelings. He felt a hand passed under his head to lift it from the pillow—felt the cool, refreshing draught creep to his parching lips—drank of it, gladly, deeply, eagerly, and fell back almost instantly into the heavy stupor from which he had just been beginning to emerge.

How long it held him he had no means of knowing, but

when he next awoke, or aroused—for his state had been rather that of insensibility than of sleep—the stars were no longer visible in the patch of sky, and the sky itself was blue and bright, as if with daylight and sunshine. Slowly the comprehension came to him that this was day; but whether morning or afternoon, whether the day following the night of his first awaking, when he saw the stars, or whether he had slept through a day and another night, and so awoke to another day again, all this was a riddle which he had scarcely sufficient energy to wonder over—certainly not enough to attempt its solution.

Still he remembered, and his muddled brain retained the discoveries which he had so slowly and painfully made in his last period of consciousness: “This is Steve Raymond—bound hand and foot and lying in a cave.” He could think that over, and understand that it was so, and wonder feebly how it came to be so. And thus far his condition was in advance of and improved from what it had been at his first awaking. Holding fast to that much information, and groping helplessly through the recesses of his darkened memory and understanding for more, he came suddenly upon a dim recollection of the man who had given him drink.

Springing up with this memory, side by side with it like a shadow, came the same thrill of nameless horror with which he had first seen the dark face gazing on him, came the same impulse to cry out—he thought he actually did cry out, but no sound came from his faintly moving lips—“You villain!” And this time the words, whether uttered or only thought, struck the same chord of memory which the face of the man had touched, and lifted, in a very small degree, the clouds from about his brain. He suddenly remembered that he had used those words before, and where, and when, and how he had uttered them. As to where—it was in the little cottage in the wood to which the strange man—ah! the clouds were lifting more and more!

He knew the dark face now; it was the face of the man who had betrayed him! When had he used those words? Why, when he felt the strange and heavy stupor overpowering him after he had drunk a glass of beer and sat down to wait for Mercy. Mercy! One idea awoke another; his brain was growing clearer and more clear so far as memory went, at least.

He remembered the strange man, the letter, the words with James; the disappointment of not finding Mercy there; the man's explanation of her absence and promise to bring her instantly.

He remembered how James had detained the man by asking him for a drink, and his own annoyance, though he had been strangely thirsty too, at the delay which the request occasioned.

For the man had brought out glasses and beer in hospitable fashion, so that he, Steve, in spite of his real impatience, could do no less than drink.

Thus far he remembered all clearly—but what came afterward?

The man went out at the cottage door—he was sure of that, leaving him and James together. They sat silent, for there seemed ill-will between them; and the suspicion—vague but persistent—which had haunted him—Steve—on the night before, grew stronger and stronger every moment. They sat silent, waiting, watching each other furtively, and James was ghastly pale.

Through all the muddle and confusion of his recollections, Steve could remember his brother's death-like face, and his own wondering horror at such an unusual degree of pallor.

"It is like sitting face to face with an animated corpse," he had said to himself; and he now remembered having thought out that very idea in those very words.

But that was his last clear memory. After that all was confused. Some recollections of having attempted to re-

mark that the man was a long time gone, and of finding a curious difficulty in his speech that alarmed him—of trying to rise from his chair and discovering that the strange numbness extended to his limbs—of seeing James rise up before him with a look on his white face that suddenly flashed all the smoldering suspicion of his recent thoughts into a furious fire—of springing toward him with that cry: “Oh, you villain!” on his lips. Of hearing the door open and knowing that the man had returned—of being seized from behind and dragged back into his chair—of struggling fiercely but feebly, and feeling strength and consciousness ebbing away; and feeling also that it was not so much his antagonist’s superior strength as his own increasing weakness and faintness that overpowered him.

These recollections—vague, clouded, confused, and mixed with a sense of keenest mental anguish, and heavy, dull, bodily pain, crowded upon his brain; not clearly as distinct thoughts or memories, but floating like dim visions among the fumes and vapors of the poisonous drug that had been given him, and whose effect was so strong upon him still that collected thought or logical reasoning was impossible. He could remember up to a certain point, but he could not argue or reason about the events he remembered.

Here was Steve Raymond, who had gone, in company with a stranger and his brother James, to a cottage in the woods to meet Mercy Craven—now lying bound, and feeling sick almost unto death, in a place that seemed like a cave. That much he knew and no more. His instinctive rage of suspicion against James, which had induced him to spring at him in the cottage, and his impulse to denounce the strange man as a villain even now, were instincts merely. He knew no cause for them, and while he wearily and feebly sought for one in the recesses of his darkened mind, the object of his painful marveling entered.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## IN THE TRAP.

A POWERFUL, swarthy, gypsy-looking fellow, who stood for a few seconds at the foot of the rough couch, and then, coming close to the passive victim, felt his pulse, as a physician might, and laid a cool hand on his burning, aching brow, and looked into his eyes. Seeing that Steve strove to speak, but could only utter inarticulate sounds, he raised a warning finger, bidding him desist.

“Wait awhile,” said he, coolly. “You’ve had a pretty stiff dose, young fellow. You’ve been lying two days and nights without any proper nourishment, and you ain’t in trim for talking. I’ll fetch you something that’ll do you good, though.”

And he turned and went away, and left Steve wondering.

Two nights and days! His head—light from the want of food, as well as from the effects of the drug he had taken—seemed to swim round and round. Two nights and days! How could it be so? What had happened to him? What was this place?

Glancing wildly around him, he now noticed an opening in one of the sides of the cave, so low that, if it served the purpose of a door, his captor, jailer, or whatever the strange man might be, must surely be under the necessity of stooping low in order to enter or depart by it. As he gazed upon it the man came through it, stooping low indeed, and bearing in his hands a plate of food and a bowl in which some savory broth smelled temptingly.

These viands, beginning with the broth, he administered to Steve, feeding him as he might have fed a child. The poor fellow took the food readily enough, for he was sore in need of it. Being fed and refreshed, he made another



attempt to speak; and this time, though the words came with difficulty, and his voice was a whisper merely, he succeeded in making himself understood.

“Two days!” he murmured, brokenly. “How came I here? What place is this? Who are you? Where is my brother?”

The man interrupted him roughly.

“Young fellow,” he said, “you keep quiet, and what you’d ought to know I’ll tell you. And mind—what’s happened to you can’t be helped or altered by no efforts o’ yours, and had best be quietly submitted to and made the best of. What place is this? you ask me. Well, seeing that you can’t get out until I choose to let you, I don’t mind telling you. This here is a cave in Dickerson’s Woods, several miles from your sweetheart’s cottage. When I say your sweetheart, I ought to say your brother’s sweetheart, for he’s the man that is to marry her. As to how you got here, why you walked here like a lamb to the slaughter, fooled by a false letter, as him and me agreed upon, and after you was stupid from the dose I’d given you in your beer, him and me just carried you in here and put you to bed like a baby. Them straps upon your legs and arms is to make sure of keeping you now we’ve got you. No harm is going to happen to you, but the contrary. You haven’t a dollar in the world, and you wanted to marry a handsome gal that hasn’t a dollar either, and your best friends can’t do kinder by you than prevent you. And the best and safest way to do that is to find her another husband, which will be your brother James. And until they’re married you’re to board with me, and I’ll take care not to lose sight of you!”

To describe the feelings of the helpless captive to whom this speech was addressed would be impossible. Rage, grief, fear, despair well-nigh maddened him. To lie here, trapped and bound, and know that she—his love—was waiting, wondering, grieving at his absence—an absence

that would doubtless be made to appear like gross neglect; to remember how proud and spirited she was, and how quick she would be to resent the seeming insult; all the more so because it was undeniable that he had given her cause for jealousy and doubt before in the matter of Ada; to think of her beauty, of James's passion for her, and the wealth that would find favor in her mother's eyes, and make her his willing ally; these thoughts drove him almost mad.

He raved, gathering brief and delusive strength from the passion of his despair, and plucked at the bonds that held him so furiously, that for a few seconds it almost seemed as if he would break them and be free.

But that was for a moment only. In the next the subtle poison still coursing through his veins had gained the mastery again of nerve and brain, and he fell back weak and panting.

"You have destroyed me!" he groaned, in agony. "What's come to me? Where's my brain, my strength? What devil's drink have you dosed me with? Have you—have you poisoned me?"

The man laughed sneeringly.

"Devil a bit!" said he. "Your loving brother thinks too much of you for that; he wouldn't hear of killing you. You're worth a few thousand dollars to me if I give you back to him—after his marriage—alive. The stuff you drank is harmless enough, unless you take too much of it. 'No real harm was to come to you,' he said. He wouldn't have you really harmed—he meant murdered—'not even for Mercy's sake!'"

Steve groaned again in the anguish of his impotent despair and rage.

"No real harm!" he panted. "And yet he will steal her from me! Oh, villain! villain! But he shall not! I am weak now. You've poisoned me and starved me, un-

til my strength is gone, but wait awhile and see if you can hold me! I will be free!"

Again the man laughed—out loudly this time, and with open mockery.

"I that caught you can be trusted to keep you!" said he. "You won't get out of the trap so easily, my gay bird! What? D'ye think I don't know how to clip your wings? No, no. Put all that nonsense out of your head. You won't get out until the bells have rung for Mercy Craven's wedding. The time of it may be far off or near, but here you stay until James marries her. She won't hold out long, I guess, when she's told that you're false to her, and off and away with another girl; she's a proud spirit, is Mercy. Get out!" he laughed again, in great enjoyment of the presumptuous thought. "Why, try it! Why, if you could get out with me guarding you, and determined as I am that you shall not escape me, I'd say you deserved to marry her! You'd prove yourself a smarter fellow than I take you for! Come!" he stood looking down upon his victim with malicious merriment in his black eyes and a provoking smile displaying his white teeth—"come, now, I'll make you an offer. I've said that Mercy shall marry James Raymond, and"—with a savage oath—"so she shall! But make good your boast; get back your strength, and get free in spite of me, and hang me if I won't say you've fairly won the girl, and I'll agree to stand aside and let you marry her!"

Steve heard him with indignant rage, the fiercer for his inability to give it adequate expression.

"You'll 'agree;' and 'you've said who Mercy Craven shall marry!'" he repeated, in low, faint tones that thrilled with scornful anger. "You make too free with the lady's name, you scoundrel! Who are you that you should interfere in her affairs? What are you, villain?"

The man laughed loud and long. Steve's hard words did not seem to ruffle him at all; perhaps the contrast be-

tween their high spirit and their faint, low tone, amused him. He sat down and had his laugh out before he answered, mockingly:

“Who am I that I make so free with pretty Mercy’s name and take the trouble to choose her a fitting husband? And what am I? Those are your questions, are they? I’ll answer the second one first. What am I? A gypsy, a poacher, a scamp, a rogue, and your jailer. And who am I?” He rose from his seat and stood tall and dark and defiant beside the bed. “My name, when I choose to go by it—is Roy Craven, my young friend, and I have the honor to be your handsome sweetheart’s father!”

---

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### ON THE TRACK.

JANE CRAVEN went to Philadelphia to make the necessary purchases for her daughter’s wedding outfit, and Mercy remained at the cottage, quite alone.

She refused to allow James to call upon her during her mother’s absence, averring that she both desired and needed solitude, and that they two would be likely to see quite enough of each other when they should be husband and wife.

From the very first she had taken this tone of mere civility and bare toleration with her accepted suitor, and she maintained it without remonstrance from him, for he felt that he dared not venture upon any.

This questionable good—the possession of a woman’s hand without her heart—which he had dared so much to win, was his as yet upon such slight and questionable grounds of holding that the merest trifle—a word of complaint on his own part, for instance, giving excuse for an angry humor upon hers—might upset his claim, and dash his hopes, and let the rich prize, on which his grasp had not yet firmly closed, slip through his fingers altogether.

So he consoled himself as best he could by looking forward to the near future.

“In one month,” he said to himself—“in four short weeks I shall take her away and have her all my own forever. I can afford to be patient now—and, indeed, I need some time in town to perfect my plans and make arrangements for a lengthy absence. It won’t do to bring her back under a year or two, until she has had time to quite forget her silly fancy for Steve—I must make arrangements for that.”

Besides all this, he was rather afraid of the cold, stern, beautiful girl whom he had tricked and cheated, and was a prey to all sorts of nervous terrors concerning Steve himself. Neither was he free from a certain remorse, which he strove to stifle and silence by making a liberal provision for his young brother by way of amends.

For a long time it puzzled him sorely to devise some plan by which this might be done without attracting too much attention, or arousing suspicion as to his own proceedings and intents. Being a man to whom money had, until recently, appeared the chief good in life, his proposed atonement and peace-offering naturally took a pecuniary form. Steve should be given a fair start in life—a chance that, properly used, might make him a rich man some day.

“When he gets out and learns the truth,” he mused—“learns that Mercy is married, but Ada, his first love, is still free, and that I have bestowed on him the beginning of a fortune, he will soon be consoled, no doubt. Steve was always a happy, easy-going fellow; he’ll thank me for what I am doing some day—of course he will!”

He greatly astonished Mrs. Raymond, a few days later, by announcing to her that he had, unasked and of his own free will, made really a liberal and handsome gift to Steve—“enough to give him a fair start in life,” he told her.

“I have placed ten thousand dollars in bank for him,”



he said, at the same time handing her the necessary documents. "You take charge of these till Steve returns, as I may have to go away. You see, the money is in his name, free and clear, and subject to no control but his. You will tell him that I did this to place him more on an equality with Ada, his bride. You know, mother, I promised you I would do something for Steve when he married Ada. But this I have done quite unconditionally," he hastened to add, "and I sincerely hope that he will acknowledge that Ada is a much more suitable match for him than Mercy Craven could have been. Such beauty as hers needs a costlier setting than Steve could have given it, mother, and Mercy would not long have been content without it."

Mrs. Raymond was full of pleasure and gratitude.

"You are a good brother, indeed!" she cried. "Why, with what I shall be able to leave him, Steve will be quite a rich man now, without naming Ada's fortune. I don't know how we are to thank you enough, dear. As for Mercy Craven"—she broke off here and passed into a state of wondering—"what on earth you see in her so very beautiful, except a fine figure and big black eyes, I can't find out. But then"—with sudden comprehension dawning in her kind eyes—"but then I may be no judge of a young girl's beauty, after all. And do you know, my dear"—this half timidly, for she stood in some awe of this eldest son of hers, so cold and hard he was—"do you know, I have thought sometimes that you admired Mercy almost as much as our silly Steve did, and that, since you are rich enough to deck this beauty finely, you might even choose to marry her yourself."

"You might even choose to marry her yourself!" James repeated the words with a strange accent of bitterness, and laughed at them, but not pleasantly. To think that his mother should fancy that such a marriage was merely a thing for him to choose to accomplish! He

thought of all that he had suffered and done to compass this end which Mrs. Raymond deemed so simple, and he almost groaned aloud as he thought of it. An effort turned the groan into a laugh, but into one that had so little mirth in it that the little mother looked at him quite anxiously.

“I’m all right, mother,” he said, answering the look, “and time will show whether you are a witch or not. Anyhow,” he added, gravely, “no matter whom I marry, or if I never marry at all, I have made provision for Steve’s keeping a wife, at all events.”

And with these words upon his lips he left her. Strange words they were, in the light of a new meaning that coming events were to give them—a meaning that was to come home to the heart and brain of the speaker by and by, and leave him to curse alike his own prophetic words and the generous deed they chronicled.

Meantime events began to move. Mrs. Raymond, who had religiously abstained from visiting her daughter Polly, lest she should let out to her the secret of the marriage, found it impossible to keep to herself this news of wonderful pecuniary good fortune for Steve—especially as James, in his agitation, had neglected to caution her to keep silence. She went to Polly without loss of time; and, lo! in telling her one piece of good news, out slipped the other, and Polly learned, to her delighted surprise, that Steve had married Ada.

Less scrupulous than her mother, she mentioned the matter next day, in a confidential letter to a friend in San Francisco who had been Ada’s school-mate and her own.

“We have had a romantic love affair in my family,” she wrote. “Dear little Ada West has eloped with and married my twin-brother Steve, and the two are away together now, enjoying their stolen honey-moon, no one knows where. The joke of the matter is that there was

no real necessity for an elopment at all, such a marriage being the very thing that all their friends desired for them."

Now Ada happened to be in San Francisco, and visiting at the very house to which this letter came. It was placed in her hands at once with many an exclamation of bewilderment and surprise, and she found herself confronted by a mystery.

A reported marriage between herself and Steve! Reported and believed by his own family! How could such a thing be possible? Why did not Steve himself instantly contradict— She came to a sudden stand-still in the rapid and angry current of her thoughts, checked by a strange fear. Polly's letter said, "They are away together—no one knows where." Away? Steve was away, and his absence thus strangely and monstrously accounted for by those who really loved him! A strange chill went creeping all over the girl's sensitive frame, for she had loved him, too. She asked herself, as his other true lover, the little mother, had done, "Where is he? Something is surely wrong with him! Where is Steve?"

And to Ada—rich and independent, generous and forgiving—to Ada that instinctive fear concerning her faithless lover's safety was intolerable, until everything possible was done to set it at rest. If Steve was well and safe, he must be found, and proved so for her satisfaction. If he was in danger, as her heart foreboded, he must be rescued, protected, saved. That she would save him for another woman made no difference to this true heart. His safety, his welfare, came first of all.

And thus it came to pass that she took her friend—the recipient of Polly's letter—and her friend's husband, into the secret of her doubts and fears, and with her aunt was quickly on her way to New York with a first-class detective in her company. By his advice they gave no one any

warning of their coming, but, arriving quietly, took up their residence at a plain, private hotel under an assumed name, and there settled down to await the results of the detective's preliminary inquiries.

They were rather calculated to increase anxiety than to relieve it. Steve had been absent now three weeks, and a rumor—faint and vague at first, but louder and more positive now—a rumor that he had gone to Europe to be married appeared to be generally accepted as the true cause of his absence, and considered entirely satisfactory. Mr. Hunter, the detective, reported his mother and family quite at ease concerning him; and, as for his once affianced bride—Mercy Craven—she was on the eve of marriage with his brother James.

“And this marriage is the strangest part of it all,” said Mr. Hunter, when he had given Ada this startling news. “The girl is marrying him out of pique, I think, having been persuaded that her lover had forsaken her. The mother has put about a different story, though. She has told the clergyman who is to perform the ceremony, that her daughter was advised and persuaded into discarding Mr. Stephen Raymond in order to marry Mr. James. And that young Stephen took the matter very angrily and bitterly, and went away in a fit of jealous pique, and following his old sweetheart—yourself, Miss West—to Europe, married her. The story is plausibility itself. A hot-headed young man might dash away in just such fashion on a wild-goose chase, and his statement that he was going to marry you, coupled with the fact that an engagement had actually existed between you, would easily be exaggerated into a report that the marriage had actually taken place. Upon my soul, it staggered me for a moment! I began to ask myself, ‘Can this be the true solution of the mystery after all? and shall we presently hear from the missing man that he is in Europe seeking for you, and, of course, failing in his quest?’”

Ada looked at him earnestly.

"May it not indeed be so?" she asked him. "Ah, no!"—with quick intelligence, as she met his eyes—"I see you have reasons for disbelieving this plausible story; have you not?"

Mr. Hunter nodded gravely.

"Two or three reasons," said he; "and I consider them serious ones. You shall hear them and judge: In the first place, Mr. Stephen passed his last night in New York at his brother's hotel, and left it in his company early next morning. Mr. Raymond claims that they went to Philadelphia, and there parted, and that he knows nothing further of his brother's movements; but I have ascertained, and shall be able to prove, that this is untrue. When the train left Philadelphia they were still aboard it, and sitting side by side; and their tickets were taken for Gray's Mountain, Miss Mercy Craven's dwelling-place. Yet no one saw them arrive there—no one saw them there—and Mr. Raymond next day returns alone, and denies all knowledge of his brother. This looks bad, doesn't it? But what will you think when I inform you that, on the very evening of Stephen's disappearance, his mother received a telegram from Philadelphia, and apparently sent by you, Miss West."

"By me?" cried Ada, pale and startled. "Impossible! I was then in Chicago, *en route* for—"

"I know that," said Mr. Hunter, interrupting in his turn. "But the telegram purports to be sent by you, and in it you are made to speak of yourself and Stephen as her children, and announce to her the fact of your marriage."

Ada uttered an exclamation of dismay and horror.

"It is a plot," she cried, earnestly. "My absence, just at that time, has been taken cunning advantage of by some one whose interest was concerned in having this tale of Steve's marriage believed; and who was so deeply inter-



ested as James himself, when he must have immediately proposed to Mercy? Ah, Polly said he had been caught by her fine eyes! James"—she started up excitedly—"James is the criminal, Mr. Hunter; I am sure of it!"

"That's my own opinion," answered the detective, quietly; "but we've got to prove it. It didn't take long to put you on the right track, Miss West"—looking at her with evident admiration—"you're a bit of a detective yourself, I think. Yes; if any one on earth can tell us what has become of this poor young fellow, James Raymond is the man!"

"You speak as if you pitied him, and feared—oh, worse than I can bear to think of!—for him," cried Ada, with gathering alarm. "How could Mrs. Raymond have been so deceived? I wrote her a letter, before my departure, to say good-bye, which should have been sufficient to prove to her common sense that the telegram must have been a forgery."

"She got no such letter," cried the detective, quickly. "I know that she went to your house to see you, in utter ignorance of your departure. The letter has been intercepted, Miss West, and the whole affair grows blacker and more serious in consequence. James Raymond has got rid of his rival and brother, and we must discover how. It's of no use to remain in New York; the clew to the matter is not here. Are you willing, Miss West, to go with me to Gray's Mountain immediately?—for, whether we find him living or dead, it is there we must look for Steve."

---

## CHAPTER XL.

### FREE!

"LIVING or dead!" that terrible question concerning Steve had long been tormenting others besides his would-be liberators. His captors questioned each other with

growing alarm. "Will he live?" For, after the whole villainy that had been practiced against him had been laid bare to Steve, and he had realized what utter ruin threatened his dearest hopes, and how powerless he was to avert it, a great despondency seized upon him, and threatened life and reason. Roy Craven had assured him that no further harm than the harm of his detention until Mercy's wedding-day was past was intended him, but that was injury enough. To lie there (for he could not move about by reason of his bonds, and, moreover, his strength had failed strangely, and he seemed continually half stupefied and heavy with sleep)—to lie there helpless, and count the days as they went by, and know that each one brought him nearer to the hour of his ruin and the triumph of his enemy, was to lie upon the road to madness. Prayers, promises, threats, he had tried without effect. Roy Craven met them all with sullen silence, and James never came into his sight at all, although once or twice he had heard his voice in the outer room, and had frantically cursed and called him. There is little doubt that the unhappy boy would have been driven mad indeed but for the continual, and, to him, unaccountable drowsiness which so frequently overpowered him and robbed him—often for hours together—of all knowledge of his wrongs and misery.

So the days and weeks went on—their monotony only broken occasionally by a storm of anguish and passionate despair, in which the helpless victim of this base and cruel plot rebelled and struggled wildly and vainly against the fate that hemmed him in and was so remorselessly closing around him. At such times his frantic cries might often have penetrated to the outer air, had there been anybody nigh to hear them, and his struggles would leave him—cut by his tightened bonds, and bruised, and faint—to pass from a state of utter exhaustion into that heavy, hideous, unnatural sleep, which he had learned instinctively to

dread, even though it brought upon its leaden wings the boon of kind oblivion.

Awaking out of it he would lie, sometimes for a long time, perfectly motionless, lacking even sufficient energy to do so much as open his eyes. Many a time Roy Craven had stood by his side with a refreshing drink in his hand, and on his lips the questions: "Ain't you awake yet, youngster? and ain't you thirsty?" And though he was thirsty—parched and fevered by exhaustion and excitement—he would make no answering sound or movement (so much he loathed his jailer's face and voice—so much he hated to awake and look on life again) and Roy Craven would go away believing him to be still sleeping. It happened so one afternoon, when—after one of his fits of mad despair and subsequent exhaustion and slumber—he returned to semi-consciousness and became aware of voices speaking softly just within his prison. The speakers were Roy Craven and James Raymond, and they evidently supposed their victim to be still asleep. Instinctively, rather than by any distinct effort of the will, he abstained from making any sign or sound, but lay perfectly quiet listening.

"I couldn't manage him without it!" he heard Roy Craven exclaim, evidently in reply to something James had said. "If you were to see him in one of his devil's tantrums, you'd know. He's got to be dosed, or I couldn't hold him. But it's hurting him, of course. Not that there's any harm—that is, any murderous harm—in the stuff itself as I give it to him, for it only amounts to a strong sleeping draught, but he has to have it too often. It keeps him stupid when he isn't asleep, and, between that and his fretting, he gets no nourishment. Why, he hasn't eaten enough to keep a baby alive ever since he came, and he's worn almost to skin and bone. I untied his hands after his fit of rage to-day, he looked so white and awful. If he's better when he wakes I can tie 'em

again; but if not, there'll be no need. As for his legs, if he got the bands off them, it's my belief he couldn't stand upon them, he's so weak. That's why you found this place all open, and the window out there open, too—it's because he must have air. I don't want him to die upon my hands, I can assure you—and he would have died if I hadn't given him the very best of care. Why, these four nights past I've left it open so through the night, and he never the wiser. But if he was, he couldn't get out—not while the effect of the dose is on him, and that's pretty much all the time."

"How do you give it to him?" James asked, in a low, smothered tone.

Oh, how his victim's heart throbbed—how his fingers closed spasmodically with instinctive longing to seize him! But that would be mere madness. No; he was learning something now; let him lie still and hear all the villainy, and perhaps learn how to frustrate it even yet. His heart, that had lain like lead in his breast so long, thrilled suddenly with a desperate hope. These villains were betraying their plots to him, and, being warned, he would be armed to defend himself against them. He held his breath, he controlled his nerves, and lay motionless.

"I may escape, and save her yet!" he thought. "God help me to deceive them now, and outwit them afterward!"

So the conversation went on uninterruptedly.

"It's easy enough to give it to him," answered Roy. "It can't be tasted in tea or coffee or soup, and in all these he gets it. Beer he won't touch, 'cause he knows it was that way I dosed him first. One effect of the dose is to make you awful thirsty. It causes a kind of inward fever, so that you drink and drink. Well, I take care that he always has drink beside him. When he's got enough, so as he's quiet and manageable, I leave water or milk beside him; when I see the signs of a fit coming, it's

something else, with the stuff in it. I don't give him the milk or water till the doctored drink has gone; after that he's quiet enough. 'The sleep seems to hold him longer than ever to-day,'" he added, glancing at his unhappy charge with an air of real anxiety. "Look at him! Your wedding need be soon, indeed, if he's to come out of this alive!"

"It will be in three days," James answered, hurriedly, "on Thursday afternoon, and this is Monday evening. On Saturday we shall sail for Europe, and on the day after you may set him free. Our mother will nurse him back to health, and by and by Ada will console him. He will find, too, that I have tried to make him amends. Surely you can manage him for so short a time—only one week."

Roy Craven had moved up to the bedside now. He shook his head gravely.

"I'll do my best," he said. "He'll last out the week, no doubt, and longer, but I doubt if he'll ever get over it. Look at him. You needn't fear; there's no sign of his waking yet. Look at him."

Thus urged, James came, slowly and unwillingly, and looked upon the brother he had so foully wronged. He turned away with a groan.

"I wish I had never seen your face!" he cried to Roy Craven, almost passionately. "You tempted me to do this! I wish I had never seen your face!"

The other looked at him contemptuously.

"You better wish you'd never seen my daughter's face," said he, dryly. "You did this thing for Mercy's sake, you know. However, if you repent of it, the thing may be easily undone again; it is not yet too late. Set him free now. Let Mercy nurse him back to health instead of—"

James stopped him with an oath.

"Curse your mocking tongue!" he said, savagely.



“No! I have gone too far to turn back now! Besides, no man but myself shall have her! Come! Do the best you can for him, and let me get out of this hole—it stifles me!”

They turned and went away, and presently Steve heard their voices as they passed through the outer room of the cottage and away into the woods. Then only did he throw off the seeming sleep and stupor, and sit up with sudden and unwonted energy.

“I am saved!” he muttered from his swelling heart, that almost burst with its emotions. “I will not touch his poison once again. When he leaves it by me I can throw it away behind this bed, and he will think I drank it. I can feign that horrible stupor now, it seems, well enough to deceive him. My hands are free, indeed!” He held them up to Heaven in thankfulness. “He said he would leave them so if he found me no better. I’ll make him think me dying. The window out there open too! Oh, if I could but gather strength enough to reach it and get out! And who knows but I may? Hark! he’s coming back again. Now for it! Now, Steve, set all your wits to work for Mercy’s sake!”

Roy Craven did not think it necessary to tie the hands of the poor, helpless creature whom he found on his return, lying with wide-open eyes that had no speculation in their glare. He was rather alarmed at his victim’s extreme passiveness and silence. No word or movement could he elicit from Steve in answer to his own remarks and questions; indeed, it did not appear that the sufferer even heard them. Roy stooped, and gently pushed back the lids from the staring eyes and examined the pupils anxiously.

“I’m afraid his brain is going,” he muttered to himself, “I’m afraid of it. By thunder, I believe I’ve overdosed him!”

He went into his own room hurriedly, and returned

bringing some wine, which he mixed with water and placed to his victim's lips.

"Here, Steve—here, my boy, drink this," he said, almost gently, at the same time lifting the young man's head upon his arm. "Come, it'll put some life into you."

Steve had heard enough to be well assured that no treacherous poison lurked in this draught, so he drank, but without apparent eagerness or relish. Then, as Roy Craven placed his head back upon the pillow: "Air!" he gasped, feebly. "Oh, give me air, air!" In short, he played his part so well during the next twenty-four hours, that Roy Craven was effectually and seriously alarmed. So seriously that on the morning of Wednesday—the day before the one appointed for Mercy's marriage—he began to contemplate the advisability and necessity of taking him out of the secret cave into the outer room where his own rough bed was placed, and where at least he might have more of the air he seemed to be dying for.

"There can't be any danger," he reassured himself, as he decided upon this extreme step. "He knows nothing—not even me, now, and I must keep him alive somehow. It would be devilish awkward to have him die here. I don't know how the deuce I should dispose of the body."

With these kind and comforting reflections, he took the seemingly helpless and almost unconscious prisoner in his powerful arms, and carried him into the room where, a month before, the wicked plot had been laid and the first treacherous dose had been administered.

Steve's heart beat so hard and fast that he almost thought his jailer must feel or hear its strong pulsations.

But Craven had, apparently, no suspicion that he was being fooled.

He laid his victim gently down on his own bed, and proceeded to administer wine to him.

During these last twenty-four hours, Steve had had a

certain quantity of pure and nourishing food, and not one drop of the pernicious poison.

This—together with the strong hope that now cheered him—had already worked a change in his condition which it was difficult to conceal.

He felt that this removal from the cave had brought him near to liberty, and that should any possible chance of escaping Roy's vigilance offer itself, he should have strength enough to take advantage of it. Who could tell but this very night such a chance might come? It must come soon, he thought, to be of any use, since the marriage would be to-morrow.

But it did not come that night, through which he lay, feigning heavy sleep, but really wakeful and despairing.

All night Roy Craven sat in a chair by the small fire, having given up his bed to Steve, and alternately smoked and drank, or dozed uneasily; awaking with sudden starts and muttered curses.

At last, when it must have been after six o'clock, for the first gray light of dawn was peeping in at the curtainless window, the dawn of what was to be Mercy's wedding-day, he arose, shook himself roughly, like a great dog, and pouring some coffee into a cup, dropped a small portion of the sleeping mixture into it, and put it on a stand by Steve's bed, muttering as he did so, that a man must stretch his legs a little, and that as the boy hadn't had any for two days, that little drop couldn't hurt him much, and if he awoke while he—Roy Craven—was away, would keep him quiet till he came back again.

And with that he threw on his heavy coat, and left the cottage, softly closing the door behind him, but leaving it unlocked.

This meant two things. Firstly, a chance of escape for Steve; secondly, that the chance must be taken without delay, because Roy Craven's absence would be but a brief one.

Steve waited only long enough to let his enemy get clear away from the cottage, and then crept from his bed—for he could do no more—as quickly as feeble strength and galling bands would suffer him.

His first care was to seize a knife and cut the strips of deer-hide from his ankles.

He was partly dressed, Roy having removed only his outer clothing, and that he would not stay to look for.

He was so dreadfully weak, and all his limbs so cramped with long confinement to his bed, that even his strong excitement scarcely enabled him to stand upright, and as he moved he staggered like a drunken man, but his wits did not forsake him.

He poured the coffee out of the cup on to the fire, and drew the heavy covers of the bed around the pillow in such fashion as to make it appear that his head still lay there.

This done, he opened the door with trembling hands, and closing it after him went groping and stumbling blindly through the semi-darkness, out into the woods. His sight could scarcely penetrate a yard before him—his limbs were bending under him with weakness—his heart's wild beating seemed to sound in his own ears, and deafen him—cold and terror chilled him to the bone.

In which direction to seek a human dwelling he knew not; and if such there were far off, to reach it, in his condition, would be impossible. Yet he must find friends and intelligent human aid at once, or how should he prevent this marriage?

She would only need to see him, he felt sure of that. James would be checkmated and frustrated, if he, her true lover, could but reach the church in time, even though he fell dying at her feet.

But should he ever have strength to find his way to her without aid?

Would not Roy Craven, returning to the hut, miss him,

and pursuing his slow and feeble steps, drag him back to captivity once more?

These terrors drove him almost mad. Every sound seemed, to his excited imagination, the footfall of his pursuing foe.

He knew not where he was going. For all he could tell he might be traveling in a circle through the labyrinth of the woods, that would presently bring him back to his prison and into Roy's arms.

He stumbled blindly on, growing weaker and more despairing with every step, when all at once a tall and powerful figure stepped out of the gloom in front of him; a hand was laid upon his breast—a voice sounded in his ears:

“See here! Who's this? What ails you? Where are you going?”

But Steve never heard the words—grief, rage, and horror overpowered him.

His dread had taken tangible form—here was his enemy, come to drag him back to what, this time, would be his grave!

With a howl of agony and fury, he struck out blindly, feebly enough, at his supposed adversary, and just as he felt two strong, warm hands closed firmly on his own—fell swooning on the turf at his feet.

---

## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE WEDDING-DAY.

BRIGHT and clear shone the morn of Mercy's wedding-day, but the girl looked out upon the brightness with eyes that loathed the sunlight, and her heart was full and heavy with curses on the overhaste and passionate resentment that had brought her to this pass. If she had only waited so as to marry any one but James, to whom she had conceived so positive and strong an aversion, that even his



infatuation might have shrunk from making her the partner of his life could he have known of it. But he did not.

Cold and barely civil as she had been to him at the beginning of their engagement, toward its close she withdrew herself from his company altogether whenever he ventured to call on her.

Jane Craven was always ready with reasons and excuses for this; but far more potent with James were the terrors of his own guilty conscience as reasons for bearing with her patiently.

“It will all be quite different when once she is your wife,” Jane assured him glibly; and he—sighing over the tortures of his own unsatisfied love for her, and trembling in fear of losing even the hope of legally claiming her as his own—was fain to suffer silently, and get what scraps of cold comfort he could out of her mother’s assurances.

If his had been merely a base and sensual passion that coveted only the actual possession of her, caring nothing whatever for her heart—his satisfaction in the triumph of his approaching marriage would have been much greater, and the punishment and torture which her icy coldness inflicted would have been much less.

But it was his curse to love her with a real affection, that could never be satisfied with anything less than real affection in return. And this there seemed no hope of his ever winning.

True, he comforted himself—and allowed Jane Craven to comfort him—with the belief that Mercy would love him as her husband, but in his soul he knew that this was trusting to and leaning on a very frail and broken reed; and he knew also that should it fail him the marriage which he had sinned to compass would bring no happiness to his life, but rather bitterness and curses.

And yet he persisted and went on. The assurance of his bride-elect’s cold indifference and incipient dislike could not deter him—the sight of his young brother’s

broken heart, ruined health and wreck of manhood could not win from him a moment's pause.

Over the ruins of their happiness he went on, with pitiless tread, grinding their hearts under his iron heel, as he marched on in his selfish pursuit of his own desires, indifferent to all beside them.

Not until the day before that appointed for the marriage did he inform his mother of his intentions, and request her to be prepared to welcome his bride when he should bring her to New York.

"It will be but for an hour before we sail," he said, "I shall take her to Philadelphia immediately after our marriage, and come to New York on Friday evening late. If you will be on the steamer on Saturday morning to say good-bye, mother, it is all I ask."

And Mrs. Raymond—greatly surprised and strangely uneasy, too—had consented. The little mother was growing uneasy about Steve.

A whole month gone and no word from him—surely even a newly wedded bridegroom might have found time to write to her before this! She confided her uneasiness to James.

"I don't know what I fear, my dear; but there was something queer about the whole affair, you know," she said. "Why shouldn't my own son write to me?"

James concealed the torture which the subject caused him, and answered her anxiety with a jest.

"Surely no harm could come to Steve while Ada had him in charge," he said, and never dreamed how near his chance words hit the truth. "You will be sure to have news of him in a day or two."

His preparations and arrangements were all made, so that he could, if desirable, remain abroad for two years or more without injury to his business.

"By that time I shall have won my wife's heart, if ever," he thought, "and shall not fear to bring her where

she will meet Steve;" and then he repeated, with a sigh that was half a groan, those two ominous words—"if ever."

His bride-elect, meantime, thought of him with bitter dislike, and loathed the thought of marrying him. Not that she suspected his perfidy—never for one moment. She had accepted, with jealous credulity, the story of Steve's falsehood, and only pictured him to herself as happy without her, and by Ada's side. But she loved him still; the fierceness of her jealousy and anger, the impatience of her longing to be revenged, were proofs of this.

James was the first and surest instrument of her revenge, and as such she took him; but she despised the instrument she stooped to use, and hated it because she knew the terms she took it on would not admit of its being thrown aside as soon as she should cease to need its services.

"I hate the whole family," she told her mother. "I might have waited a little longer and have had revenge, just the same, by marrying some stranger; but, with these Raymonds for relatives, and living in their midst, I shall loathe my life!"

Then Jane Craven set herself to the task of soothing her, just as she often soothed James.

"The more intimately you are related, the better your chances of punishing him will be, by forcing him to contrast you with his wife. And James will be your slave—a wife needs to have her husband pretty well under her thumb when she uses him to rouse another man's jealousy. If nothing will content you but punishing Steve, I don't see how you could possibly have married better."

To do Mrs. Craven justice, however, she only said these things to Mercy because she thought they jumped best with the girl's bitter and revengeful mood, to cross which, by opposition, would have been but to inflame it. In her

secret heart she did truly believe that this girl, whose life had been so hard and bare, would, after marriage, turn with real kindness to the rich man who adored her, and who would lavish his wealth to secure her pleasure, and buy a portion of her love. The worldly minded mother said to herself, as she often said to James:

“It will all come right, and she will be fond enough of him when once they are married.”

And so, with Jane Craven in the character of peacemaker, soothing the ill-matched pair, and watchful to lull to rest the elements of discord that were ever threatening storms between them, the month of probation and preparation rolled swiftly by, and brought round the appointed wedding-day.

Bright and cold and clear it opened. Jane Craven was up betimes, for excitement had kept her waking; but Mercy, who had passed a wretched night, and only fell asleep as morning dawned—Mercy slept late.

Her mother had looked in at her door two or three times without disturbing her.

“There’s time enough, as the marriage is fixed for the afternoon,” she thought; “let her rest.”

There was policy as well as kindness in this course, since it was not well that Mercy should have too much time for regretful thought, even now, and the preparations for her journey being all completed, and the cares of her wedding-toilet being very simple, there was little enough to occupy her between her waking and the hour of her marriage. “If she would sleep until twelve o’clock,” mused Jane, “so much the better.”

She slept until ten, however, and awoke pale and trembling from the terror and excitement of a strange dream. She had dreamed of Steve—had seen him in grief and trouble, lying helpless in a wild, desolate place, drenched, as it seemed to her, with his own tears, and almost dying. He had called to her, in accents of anguish that pained

her heart, to stop, to wait, to come to him. But when she would have obeyed the summons, Ada had suddenly stood between them and waved her back; so that she awoke jealous, heartsick, unnerved, and trembling. The dream did not make her pause, however, rather it encouraged her to carry out her resolution.

“So he shall cry out for me, when it is too late,” she thought, “and feel that his own falsehood placed a barrier between us; and then, when he realizes that Ada is that barrier, he will curse her for it.”

Jane, coming to her room, was agreeably surprised to find her dressing as calmly and leisurely, to all outward seeming, as if for the most ordinary visit to church. Nothing in her costume gave any hint of the real nature of the occasion for which it was worn, as she had chosen to be married in the dress she would afterward travel in. The wedding was to be of the quietest and most private description—no cake, no cards, no breakfast, no returning home. The happy couple would drive from the church to the depot, and depart for Philadelphia without delay, the hour for the ceremony having been so timed as to make this proceeding practicable.

As for James, he had remained in town to the last moment possible, arriving at Gray’s Mountain on the early morning train. Had he missed that, he would still have been able to arrive at noon, by the same train that brought Steve to his doom a month before. The wedding had been arranged to take place at two, so as to meet this contingency, if necessary. But James had a superstitious horror of that noon arrival. An all-night journey seemed infinitely preferable to him, even though it left him nervous and fatigued and pale upon his marriage morning.

Mercy and her mother, quietly and darkly attired, walked to the church, which was at a short distance only. So did the pale bridegroom, by a different and somewhat longer road. A carriage was ordered from the one hotel



of Gray's Mountain to take them from the church to the depot, after the ceremony; but James was too nervous and excited to sit shut up in it and be driven to church, preferring to get rid, if possible, of some of his intense excitability by the healthy motion of a sharp, brisk walk. He was the first of the bridal-party to arrive, and presently received and welcomed the beautiful bride, who looked as coldly handsome and unmoved, and met him as chillingly, as if she had been a statue of marble, rather than a woman of flesh and blood.

Quietly ignoring his offered arm, and signing to her mother to walk between them, Mercy entered the church and went resolutely toward the altar, where the clergyman was already waiting to receive them.

There were very few people in the church, the affair having been kept as quiet as possible, and the actual date of the marriage confided to none. One or two casual passers-by, seeing the sacred edifice open at an unusual time, had looked in to see what was going on, and now loitered idly for the ceremony. Among these Mercy classed a lady heavily veiled, who watched the bridal-party from the shelter of a pillar, behind which she seemed to shrink as the bride's dark eyes turned that way. But the dark eyes little heeded what they saw, being heavy and dull with anguish, and Mercy's thought—"Some stranger visiting here"—passed in and out of her troubled mind almost unconsciously.

Next minute she was placed before the altar-rails—James had taken her cold hand within his own. Her sight grew dim, for all her self-control, and she seemed to hear a voice, coming from a long distance, low and faint, asking her whether she would take the man beside her for her husband, and be to him a true and loving wife.

"A true and loving wife!" Those words struck louder on her heart than on her ears, and filled her with a sudden consternation. For the first time since her solemn engage-

ment had been so hastily made, she seemed to realize how solemn a thing marriage was, and how opposite to its true purpose were the motives and the spirit in which she was undertaking it—to be to him, to the man beside her, while her heart was full of love for another, “a true and loving wife till death doth them part.” How could she? How was it possible? Did she not already despise, and should she not presently hate him?

These thoughts and questions passed swifter than lightning through her brain, and instead of answering, she suddenly turned and looked into James Raymond’s face, her own turning ghastly, deathly pale, while she shuddered violently and visibly. Then, glancing wildly around her, and quite losing self-control:

“Wait, wait! give me time! let me think!” she gasped.  
“Oh, wait!”

Jane Craven sprung forward instantly, and laying a firm hand on her shoulder, tried to recall her to herself.

“What ails you? are you mad?” she cried, in suppressed tones of anger, while the clergyman paused, in shocked surprise, and James Raymond, white and trembling like herself, stared helplessly.

“Go on, I tell you!” continued the mother, fiercely.  
“Make the responses! Don’t stand staring like a fool! Answer ‘I will.’ Do you hear me, Mercy?” and she shook the pale, bewildered girl with uncontrollable anger.  
“Answer him!”

But at that instant another voice—a woman’s, soft and clear—rang through the church:

“No; let her answer me, first!”

Mercy turned, with a shriek, to the sound. The lady whom she had noticed near the pillar had left her place, and came hurrying toward her. She threw back her veil as she confronted the startled bride, and lo! it was Ada West!

“Let her answer me before another word is said!” she

cried, excitedly. "Mercy Craven, what have you done with the man whom I once loved—with the lover you stole away from me? Before you speak the words that make you James Raymond's wife, answer me, and truly, before Heaven, what has become of Steve?"

---

## CHAPTER XLII.

AT sight of her rival, the trembling bride ceased trembling, and suddenly appeared to turn hard and stern and cold. She pushed her mother away and confronted Ada proudly. Jealous hatred shone in her dark eyes.

"Do you ask that of me?" she cried, in tones that had something of triumph in their scorn. "You, for whom he abandoned me! Am I your husband's keeper, madame?" Then she laughed with bitter insolence. "And could you not hold him longer than this, with all your wealth that bought him?" she asked, mockingly. "Has he tired of his bargain so soon? Only the bride of a month, and forsaken! Why, my poor love could have held him longer than that, I think. Poor Ada!"

Her tone, her look, and manner might have provoked a saint, but Ada showed no anger.

Fixing her soft blue eyes on Mercy's face, she had watched her closely, and she saw at once that all this bitter insolence was real, and arose from real pain—the intolerable pain of jealousy.

"Poor Mercy, rather," she said, sadly, when the bride had paused. "Poor dupe of a wicked plot and a lying story. Steve is no husband of mine. I am not married. Steve and I parted in your presence, weeks ago, and from that day till this I have never seen him! What has become of him answer you—to whom he trusted his heart and hopes, and for whom he would have given his life! His love for me was but as a brother's, but to you was given his whole heart; yet surely I have loved him best,

for when I heard that he was false to you and had gone to Europe for my sake, I knew at once that the tale was false, and felt that some danger threatened him. Where was your love that it could not see as clearly? This man"—she turned with sudden fierceness upon James, who, white as death and seemingly stunned, had heard her without interruption—"this criminal loved you, too, and was his brother's secret rival, while—simple, credulous dupes, as you were, both of you trusted him. And he has betrayed you! In his company Steve left New York and came to this place a month ago, since when he has not been seen. And now—as I see that you have been foolish rather than false, and can give me no account of your lost lover—let James Raymond answer me the question, which otherwise he shall answer to the law—where is Steve?"

But James Raymond could not answer her. The shock of this disclosure—the frustration of all his hopes and plans—the certain loss of the woman he had so madly loved, and the thought of the exposure and disgrace that must follow this failure of his wicked schemes—all these agitations were too much for him. He strove to speak—to move—to go away—but tongue and limbs were alike powerless. Shame, rage, despair, overpowered him.

He trembled like one in an ague fit, and his eyes roved wildly around him as if seeking some escape—then, with a groan so deep that it seemed to rend his very being and let his life out, he fell senseless in their midst.

At the same instant, and while ready hands were raising him and carrying him away, all eyes turned suddenly on her who should have been his bride—now—after standing silent and motionless, as if Ada's communication had stricken her into stone—she seemed suddenly to arouse herself to a consciousness of her own and her young lover's wrongs and misery; and, giving away to a paroxysm of despairing grief, began to lament aloud for him.

"Steve! Steve!" she cried. "Oh, Steve, my love,

where are you? Oh, what a credulous, jealous fool I have been! I loved him! I loved him! and my love has been his ruin; it is I who have murdered him—I—not James—my jealous credulity has killed him! But I will not survive him!" her eyes grew wild as she glanced around her. "There are ways and means to die! Let me go!" she struck her mother's arms aside, and tried to spring away. "Let me go!"

But Ada held her; Ada spoke to her, and she yielded to her rival's voice and touch.

It was strange to see these two women, lately such bitter foes, now clasped and weeping in each other's arms.

"He is not dead—Steve is not dead, thank God!" these were the welcome words with which Ada soothed and calmed her. "He is safe, though very, very ill; and with you to nurse him he will, please Heaven, recover. Calm yourself, Mercy, that you may be fit to go to him. Think, dear—for you and I are enemies and rivals no longer, but sisters from this hour—think of what I say. Steve is safe, but he has suffered much, and is very sick, and you alone can cure and comfort him. There! That's right! You are calmer now. We will go to him together!"

And so they did; and together—assisted by his mother, who had been telegraphed for—nursed him through the long and dangerous illness that ensued. So ill he was for many weeks, that jealousy and rivalry, if they had not been dead already, would have died in the presence of his peril and pain. For a long time it was not a question of who he should live for, but whether he would live at all.

And not until that dreadful doubt was set at rest did they learn the whole story of his captivity and escape. All they knew was that the detective, Mr. Hunter, who had traced him to Gray's Mountain, and, grown hopeless of finding him alive, was night and day employed in searching for traces of a murder in the woods, had suddenly come upon him in the early dawn, wandering blind-



ly among the trees, and had literally carried him, a helpless and insensible burden, to this quiet cottage where Ada had lodged for days. On recovering consciousness, he could do nothing but implore them to stop Mercy's marriage by denouncing James, which Ada, leaving Hunter to procure medical aid, had proceeded to do accordingly.

No sooner was this great anxiety removed from his mind by the sight of Mercy, actually restored to him, and there at his bedside, than his nervous system succumbed before the horrible strain that it had endured so long, and fever and delirium followed. In this condition, no clew to his late captors, no hint as to the place of his detention could be obtained from him, and Roy Craven took quick advantage of the chance thus given him to escape; which he did so effectually that no trace of him was ever found, nor did Steve or Mercy ever again hear of him.

As for James, he had been taken, in the carriage in which he had hoped to bear a bride away, to the hotel, and a doctor sent for. It was a long time before he recovered consciousness, and when he did so he was extremely ill, and appeared likely to continue so. Great was the astonishment of the doctor, when he called next day, to find that his patient had disappeared. He left a note for his mother—a few brief, cold lines that gave no clew to his real intentions.

“I am going home,” he wrote. “I have played a bold game—tell Stephen, when he recovers—and have lost it. He and I will settle by and by. You will find me in New York when you return.”

But they did not find him. Six weeks later, when they did return, they found, on the contrary, that he had quietly and privately settled his affairs, and apparently left the country. His business had been disposed of by private contract, and had passed into other hands, and “the place thereof knew him no more.”

No one was grieved, unless it was the little mother. He was her son, though little enough like one. But even she could not but acknowledge that his departure was the best possible course, under all the circumstances; and the recovery of her youngest and favorite son, and the sight of his happiness, soon consoled her.

For Steve at last was truly happy. "Out of evil oft cometh good;" and a brother's wickedness, which for a time had strewed his path with thorns, had also, indirectly, cleared it of some substantial difficulties. The money which James had lavished upon Mercy, as well as that which he had bestowed on Steve, served the young couple for a marriage portion on which it was possible to make a fair start in life, without the fear of Mrs. Craven's pet horror—poverty.

And married they were as soon as Steve's recovery made it possible, Jane Craven, shocked at the discovery of James's real character, offering no further opposition to her daughter's wishes; and the little mother, quite won by the girl's devotion during Steve's illness, withdrawing all her previous objections and taking her new daughter cordially to her heart.

So these two lovers, who "between two loves" had suffered so much, found happiness at last in the one and only true love. No cloud marred the brightness of their wedding-day, not even the thought that what was all joy to them might cause a pang to Ada. For Ada's interest had been so deeply aroused by the detective business in which she had recently been engaged, that her former lover evidently occupied less of her thoughts than did the clever, handsome detective whose skill and acuteness had saved him.

Ada was Mercy's bride-maid on the happy day, and it was Mr. Hunter who gave away the bride; and it did not require superhuman intelligence to hazard a guess that a day might come when the handsome pair might go to

church together again for a more serious purpose, on which occasion the detective would receive a bride, instead of giving away one. All happiness to Ada, if it should prove so; so prayed the blushing bride as she kissed her good-bye.

“It is to you we owe our joy,” she whispered. “Dear, gentle, generous Ada! May God reward you with a truer love than that you lost! And in that new and true love may you forget all you have ever suffered for Mercy’s sake!”

THE END.



*"Get Wisdom."*

When you get that you will get Pearline. A million wise women have got it already. With it, they have clean clothes that are not worn out with rubbing or injured by chemicals, and everything in the house is spotless. Without it, they have harder work and worse results. But they'll never be

*Millions use Pearline.*

**Beware**

of imitations which are being peddled from door to door. First quality goods do not require such desperate methods to sell them. PEARLINE sells on its merits, and is manufactured only by

200

JAMES PYLE, New York.

## W. L. DOUGLAS \$3 SHOE FOR GENTLEMEN.

**FOR GENTLEMEN.**

**\$5.00**

Genuine Hand-Sewed.

**\$1.00**

Hand-Sewed Welt Shoe.

**\$3.50**

Police and Farmer.

**\$2.50**

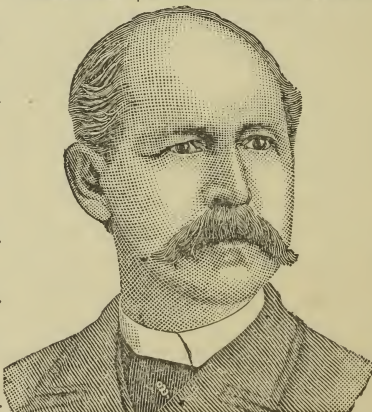
Extra Value Calf Shoe.

**\$2.25**

Workingman's Shoe.

**\$2.00**

Goodwear Shoe.



**FOR LADIES.**

**\$3.00**

Best Dongola.

**\$2.00**

Extra Value for the price.

**\$1.75**

For MISSES.

**For Boys and Youths.**

**\$2 & \$1.75**

**SCHOOL SHOES.**

W. L. Douglas Shoes for Gentlemen are made in Congress, Button and Lace, sized 5 to 11, including half sizes and widths, and all styles of toe. Boys' sized 1 to 5 1-2, and youth's 11 to 13 1-2, also half sizes in each.

W. L. Douglas \$3 Shoe for Ladies. Sizes 1 to 7, and half sizes; B, C, D, E, EE widths.

\$2 Shoe for Ladies. Sizes 1 to 7, including half sizes; C, D, E, and EE widths.

W. L. Douglas \$1.75 Shoe for Misses. 11 to 2 and half sizes, regular and spring heels.

W. L. Douglas's name and the price are stamped on bottom of all shoes, and every pair are warranted. Send name and address on postal card for valuable information.

W. L. DOUGLAS, Brockton, Mass.

# Die Deutsche Library.

Nachfolgende Werke sind in der „Deutschen Library“ erschienen.

1 Der Kaiser von Prof. G. Ebers	20	40 Die weisse Frau von Greifen-	20
2 Die Somosierra von R. Wald-	10	stein von E. Fels.....	20
3 Das Geheimniß der alten Mam-	10	41 Haus und Grete von Fr. Spiel-	10
sell. Roman von E. Marlitt.	10	hagen.....	10
4 Quisisana von Fr. Spielhagen	10	42 Mein Onkel Don Juan von H.	20
5 Gartenlauben-Blüthen von E.	20	Hopfen.....	20
Werner.....	20	43 Markus König v. Gustav Frey-	20
6 Die Hand der Nemesis von E.	20	tag.....	20
A. König.....	20	44 Die schönen Amerikanerinnen	10
7 Amtmann's Magd v. E. Marlitt	20	von Fr. Spielhagen.....	10
8 Vineta von E. Werner.....	20	45 Das grosse Loos v. A. König..	20
9 Auf der Rummingsburg von M.	10	46 Zur Ehre Gottes von Sacher	10
Widdern.....	10	und Ultimo v. F. Spielhagen	10
10 Das Haus Hillel von Max Ring	20	47 Die Geschwister von Gustav	20
11 Glückauf! von E. Werner.....	10	Freytag.....	20
12 Goldelse von E. Marlitt.....	10	48 Bischof und König von Mariam	10
13 Vater und Sohn von F. Lewald	10	Tenger und der Piratenkö-	10
14 Die Würger von Paris von C.	20	nig von M. Jokai.....	10
Vacano.....	20	49 Reichsgräfin Gisela v. Marlitt	20
15 Der Diamantschleifer von Ro-	10	50 Bewegte Zeiten v. Leon Alexan-	10
senthal-Bonin.....	10	drowsitsch.....	10
16 Ingo und Ingraban von Gustav	20	51 Um Ehre und Leben von E. A.	20
Freytag.....	20	König.....	20
17 Eine Frage von Georg Ebers..	10	52 Aus einer kleinen Stadt v. Gu-	20
18 Im Paradiese von Paul Heyse	20	stav Freytag.....	20
19 In beiden Hemisphären von	10	53 Hildegard von Ernst v. Waldow	10
Sutro.....	10	54 Dame Orange von Hans Wa-	20
20 Gelebt und gelitten von H. Wa-	20	chenhusen.....	20
chenhusen.....	20	55 Johannisnacht von M. Schmidt	10
21 Die Eichhofs von M. von Rei-	10	56 Angela von Fr. Spielhagen...	20
chenbach.....	10	57 Falsche Wege von J. v. Brun-	10
22 Kinder der Welt von P. Heyse.	20	Barnow.....	10
Erste Hälfte.....	20	58 Versunkene Welten von Wilh.	20
22 Kinder der Welt von P. Heyse.	20	Jensen.....	20
Zweite Hälfte.....	20	59 Die Wohnungssucher von A.	10
23 Barfüßele von Berthold Auer-	10	von Winterfeld.....	10
bach.....	10	60 Eine Million von E. A. König	20
24 Das Nest der Zaunkönige von	20	61 Das Skelet von F. Spielhagen	10
G. Freytag.....	20	und Das Frölenhaus von Gu-	10
25 Frühlingsboten von E. Werner	10	stav zu Putlitz.....	10
26 Zelle No. 7 von Pierre Zacone	20	62 Soll und Haben v. G. Freytag.	20
27 Die junge Frau v. H. Wachen-	20	Erste Hälfte.....	20
husen.....	20	62 Soll und Haben v. G. Freytag.	20
28 Buchenheim von Th. v. Varn-	10	Zweite Hälfte.....	20
bübler.....	10	63 Schloss Grünwald von Char-	10
29 Auf der Bahn des Verbrechens	20	lotte Fiebt.....	10
v. Ewald A. König.....	20	64 Zwei Kreuzherren von Lucian	20
30 Brigitta von Berth. Auerbach..	10	Herbert.....	20
31 Im Schillingshof v. E. Marlitt	20	65 Die Erlebnisse einer Schutzlo-	10
32 Gesprengte Fesseln v. E. Wer-	10	sen v. Kath. Sutro-Schücking	10
ner.....	10	66 Das Haideprinzesschen von E.	20
33 Der Heiduck von Hans Wa-	20	Marlitt.....	20
chenhusen.....	20	67 Die Geyer-Wally von Wilh. von	10
34 Die Sturmhexe von Gräfin M.	10	Hillern.....	10
Keyserling.....	10	68 Idealisten von A. Reinow.....	20
35 Das Kind Bajazzo's von E. A.	20	69 Am Altar von E. Werner.....	10
König.....	20	70 Der König der Luft von A. v.	20
36 Die Brüder vom deutschen	10	Winterfeld.....	20
Hause von Gustav Freytag..	10	71 Moschko von Parma v. Karl E.	10
37 Der Wilddieb v. F. Gerstäcker	10	Franzos.....	10
38 Die Verlobte von Rob. Wald-	20	72 Schuld und Sühne von Ewald	20
müller.....	20	A. König.....	20
39 Der Doppelgänger von L.	10	73 In Reih' und Glied v. F. Spiel-	20
Schücking.....	10	hagen. Erste Hälfte.....	20



73 In Reih' und Glied v. F. Spielhagen. Zweite Hälfte.....	20	106 Fürst und Musiker von Max Ring.....	20
74 Geheimnisse einer kleinen Stadt von A. von Winterfeld.....	10	107 Nena Sahib v. J. Retcliffe. Erster Band.....	20
75 Das Landhaus am Rhein von B. Auerbach. Erste Hälfte..	20	107 Nena Sahib von J. Retcliffe. Zweiter Band.....	20
75 Das Landhaus am Rhein von B. Auerbach. Zweite Hälfte.....	20	107 Nena Sahib von J. Retcliffe. Dritter Band.....	20
76 Clara Vere von Friedrich Spielhagen.....	10	108 Reise nach dem Mittelpunkt der Erde von Julius Verne.....	10
77 Die Frau Bürgermeisterin von G. Ebers.....	20	109 Die silberne Hochzeit von S. Kohn.....	10
78 Aus eigener Kraft von Wilh. v. Hillern.....	20	110 Das Spukehaus von A. v. Winterfeld.....	20
79 Ein Kampf um's Recht von K. Franzos.....	20	111 Die Erben des Wahnsinns von T. Marx.....	10
80 Prinzessin Schnee von Marie Widdern.....	10	112 Der Ulan von Joh. van Dewart.....	10
81 Die zweite Frau von E. Marlitt.....	20	113. Um hohen Preis v. E. Werner.....	20
82 Benvenuto von Fanny Lewald.....	10	114 Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten von B. Auerbach. Erste Hälfte.....	20
83 Pessimisten von F. von Stengel.....	20	114 Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten v. B. Auerbach. Zweite Hälfte.....	20
84 Die Hofdame der Erzherzogin von F. von Witzleben-Wendelstein.....	10	115 Reise um die Erde von Julius Verne.....	10
85 Ein Vierteljahrhundert von B. Young.....	20	116 Cäsars Ende von S. J. R. (Schluss von 104).....	20
86 Thüringer Erzählungen von E. Marlitt.....	10	117 Auf Capri von Carl Detlef.....	10
87 Der Erbe von Mortella von A. Dom.....	20	118 Severa von E. Hartner.....	20
88 Vom armen ägyptischen Mann v. Hans Wachenhusen.....	10	119 Ein Arzt der Seele von Wilh. v. Hillern.....	20
89 Der goldene Schatz aus dem dreissigjährigen Krieg v. E. A. König.....	20	120 Die Livergnas von Hermann Willfried.....	10
90 Das Fräulein von St. Amaranthe von R. von Gottschall.....	10	121 Zwanzigtausend Meilen unter'm Meer von J. Verne.....	20
91 Der Fürst von Montenegro v. A. Winterfeld.....	20	122 Mutter und Sohn von August Godin.....	10
92 Um ein Herz von E. Falk.....	10	123 Das Haus des Fabrikanten v. Samarow.....	20
93 Uarda von Georg Ebers.....	20	124 Bruderpflicht und Liebe von Schücking.....	10
94 In der zwölften Stunde von Fried. Spielhagen und Ebbe und Fluth von M. Widdern.....	10	125 Die Römerfahrt der Epigonen v. G. Samarow. Erste Hälfte.....	20
95 Die von Hohenstein von Fr. Spielhagen. Erste Hälfte..	20	125 Die Römerfahrt der Epigonen v. G. Samarow. Zweite Hälfte.....	20
95 Die von Hohenstein von Fr. Spielhagen. Zweite Hälfte..	20	126 Porkeles und Porkelessa von J. Scherr.....	10
96 Deutsch und Slavisch v. Lucian Herbert.....	10	127 Ein Friedensstörer von Victor Blüthgen und Der heimliche Gast von R. Byr.....	20
97 Im Hause des Commerzien-Raths von Marlitt.....	20	128 Schöne Frauen v. R. Edmund Hahn.....	10
98 Helene von H. Wachenhusen und Die Prinzessin von Portugal v. A. Meissner.....	10	129 Bakchen und Thyrsoträger von A. Niemann.....	20
99 Aspasia von Robert Hammerling.....	20	130 Getrennt. Roman von E. Polko.....	10
100 Ekkehard v. Victor v. Scheffel.....	20	131 Alte Ketten. Roman von L. Schücking.....	20
101 Ein Kampf um Rom v. F. Dahn. Erste Hälfte.....	20	132 Ueber die Wolken v. Wilhelm Jensen.....	10
101 Ein Kampf um Rom v. F. Dahn. Zweite Hälfte.....	20	133 Das Gold des Orion von H. Rosenthal-Bonin.....	10
102 Spinoza von Berth. Auerbach.....	20	134 Um den Halbmond von Samarow. Erste Hälfte.....	20
103 Von der Erde zum Mond von J. Verne.....	10	134 Um den Halbmond von Samarow. Zweite Hälfte.....	20
104 Der Todesgruss der Legionen von G. Samarow.....	20	135 Troubadour - Novellen von P. Heyse.....	10
105 Reise um den Mond von Julius Verne.....	10		

136 Der Schweden-Schatz von H. Wachenhusen.....	20	168 Die Saxoborussen von Samarow. Zweite Hälfte.....	20
137 Die Bettlerin vom Pont des Arts und Das Bild des Kaisers von Willh. Hauff.....	10	169 Serapis. Roman v. G. Ebers .	20
138 Modelle. Hist. Roman von A. v. Winterfeld.....	20	170 Ein Gottesurtheil. Roman von E. Werner.....	10
139 Der Krieg um die Haube von Stefanie Keyser.....	10	171 Die Kreuzfahrer. Roman von Felix Dahn.....	20
140 Numa Roumestan v. Alphonse Daudet.....	20	172 Der Erbe von Weidenhof von F. Pelzel.....	20
141 Spätsommer. Novelle von C. von Sydow und Engelid, Novelle v. Balduin Möllhausen	10	173 Die Reise nach dem Schicksal v. Franzos.....	10
142 Bartolomäus von Brusehaver u. Musma Cussalin. Novellen von L. Ziemssen.....	10	174 Villa Schönöw. Roman v. W. Raabe.....	10
143 Ein gemeuchelter Dichter. Komischer Roman von A. von Winterfeld. Erste Hälfte....	20	175 Das Vermächtniss v. Eckstein. Erste Hälfte.....	20
143 Ein gemeuchelter Dichter. Komischer Roman von A. von Winterfeld. Zweite Hälfte..	20	175 Das Vermächtniss v. Eckstein. Zweite Hälfte.....	20
144 Ein Wort. Neuer Roman von G. Ebers.....	20	176 Herr und Frau Bewer von P. Lindau.....	10
145 Novellen von Paul Heyse.....	10	177 Die Nihilisten von Joh. Scherr	10
146 Adam Homo in Versen v. Paludan-Müller.....	20	178 Die Frau mit den Karfunkelsteinen von E. Marlitt.....	20
147 Ihr einziger Bruder von W. Heimbürg.....	10	179 Jetta. Von George Taylor....	20
148 Ophelia. Roman von H. von Lankenau.....	20	180 Die Stieftochter. Von J. Smith	20
149 Nemesia v. Helene v. Hülsen	10	181 An der Heilquelle. Von Fried. Spielhagen.....	20
150 Felicitas. Histor. Roman von F. Dahn.....	10	182 Was der Totenkopf erzählt, von Jokai.....	20
151 Die Claudier. Roman v. Ernst Eckstein.....	20	183 Der Zigeunerbaron, von Jokai	10
152 Eine Verlorene von Leopold Kompert.....	10	184 Himmlische u. irdische Liebe, von Paul Heyse.....	20
153 Luginsland. Roman von Otto Roquette.....	20	185 Ehre, Roman v. O. Schubert....	20
154 Im Banne der Musen von W. Heimbürg.....	10	186 Violanta, Roman v. E. Eckstein	20
155 Die Schwester v. L. Schücking	10	187 Nemi, Erzählung von H. Wachenhusen.....	10
156 Die Colonie von Friedrich Gerstäcker.....	20	188 Strandgut, von Joh. v. Dewall. Erste Hälfte.....	20
157 Deutsche Liebe. Roman v. M. Müller.....	10	188 Strandgut, von Joh. v. Dewall. Zweite Hälfte.....	20
158 Die Rose von Delhi von Fels. Erste Hälfte.....	20	189 Homo sum, Roman von Georg Ebers.....	20
158 Die Rose von Delhi von Fels. Zweite Hälfte.....	20	190 Eine Aegyptische Königstochter, von Georg Ebers. Erste Hälfte.....	20
159 Debora. Roman von W. Müller	10	190 Eine Aegyptische Königstochter, von Georg Ebers. Zweite Hälfte.....	20
160 Eine Mutter v. Friedrich Gerstäcker.....	20	191 Sanct Michael, von E. Werner. Erste Hälfte.....	20
161 Friedhofsblume von W. von Hillern.....	10	191 Sanct Michael, von E. Werner. Zweite Hälfte.....	20
162 Nach der ersten Liebe von K. Frenzel.....	20	192 Die Nilbraut, von Georg Ebers. Erste Hälfte.....	20
163 Gebannt u. erlöst v. E. Werner	20	192 Die Nilbraut, von Georg Ebers. Zweite Hälfte.....	20
164 Uhlenshans. Roman von Fried. Spielhagen.....	20	193 Die Andere, von W. Heimbürg	20
165 Klytia. Roman von G. Taylor.	20	194 Ein armes Mädchen, von W. Heimbürg.....	20
166 Mayo. Erzählung v. P. Lindau	10	195 Der Roman der Stiftsdame, von Paul Heyse.....	20
167 Die Herrin von Ibachstein von F. Henkel.....	20	196 Kloster Wendhusen, von W. Heimbürg.....	20
168 Die Saxoborussen von Samarow. Erste Hälfte.....	20	197 Das Vermächtniss Kains, von Sacher-Masoch. Erste Hälfte	20
		197 Das Vermächtniss Kains, von Sacher-Masoch. Zweite Hälfte	20
		198 Frau Venus, von Karl Frenzel	20

199 Eine Viertelstunde Vater, von F. W. Hackländer.....	10	216 Zwei Seelen, von R. Lindau....	20
200 Heimatklang, von E. Werner...	10	217 Manöver- u. Kriegsbilder, von Joh. von Dewall.....	10
201 Herzenskrisen, von W. Heimbürg.....	20	218 Lore von Tollen, von W. Heimbürg.....	20
202 Die Schwestern, von G. Ebers..	20	219 Spitzen, von P. Lindau... ..	20
203 Der Egoist, von E. Werner....	10	220 Der Referendar, von E. Eckstein.....	10
204 Salvatore, von E. Eckstein....	20	221 Das Geiger-Evchen, von A. Dom	20
205 Lumpenmüllers Lieschen, von W. Heimbürg.....	20	222 Die Götterburg, von M. Jokai	20
206 Das einsame Haus, von Adolf Streckfus.....	20	223 Der Kronprinz und die deutsche Kaiserkrone, von G. Freytag	10
207 Die verlorene Handschrift, von G. Freytag. Erste Hälfte...	20	224 Nicht im Geleise, von Ida Boy-Ed .....	20
207 Die verlorene Handschrift, von G. Freytag. Zweite Hälfte...	20	225 Camilla, von E. Eckstein.....	20
208 Das Eulenhäus, von E. Marlitt	20	226 Josua, eine Erzählung aus biblischer Zeit, von G. Ebers....	20
209 Des Herzens Golgatha, von H. Wachenhusen.....	20	227 Am Belt, von Gregor Samarow	20
210 Aus dem Leben meiner alten Freundin, von W. Heimbürg	20	228 Henrik Ibsen's Gesammelte Werke. Erster Band.....	20
211 Die Gred, von G. Ebers. Erste Hälfte .....	20	228 Henrik Ibsen's Gesammelte Werke. Zweiter Band.....	20
211 Die Gred, von G. Ebers. Zweite Hälfte .....	20	228 Henrik Ibsen's Gesammelte Werke. Dritter Band.....	20
212 Trudchens Heirath, von Wilh. Heimbürg.....	20	228 Henrik Ibsen's Gesammelte Werke. Vierter Band.....	20
213 Asbein, von Ossip Schubin....	20	229 In geistiger Irre, von H. Köhler	20
214 Die Alpenfee, von E. Werner..	20	230 Flammenzeichen, v. E. Werner	10
215 Nero, von E. Eckstein. Erste Hälfte .....	20	231 Der Seelsorger, von V. Valentin	10
215 Nero, von E. Eckstein. Zweite Hälfte .....	20	232 Der Präsident, von K. E. Franzos	20
		233 Erlachhof, Roman von Ossib Schubin.....	20

*Ein schöner ausgegearbeiteter Catalog, enthaltend eine alphabetische List, wird von GEORGE MUNRO für 10 cents an alle Adressen versendet.*

„Die Deutsche Library“ ist bei allen Zeitungshändlern zu haben, oder wird gegen 12 Cents für einfache Nummern, oder 25 Cents für Doppelnummern nach irgend einer Adresse portofrei versendet. Bei Bestellungen durch die Post bittet man nach Nummern zu bestellen.

**George Munro, Herausgeber,**

P. O. Box 3751.

17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.

## The New York Fashion Bazar Book of the Toilet.

WITH HANDSOME LITHOGRAPHED COVER.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

This is a little book which we can recommend to every lady for the Preservation and Increase of Health and Beauty. It contains full directions for all the arts and mysteries of personal decoration, and for increasing the natural graces of form and expression. All the little affections of the skin, hair, eyes, and body, that detract from appearance and happiness, are made the subjects of precise and excellent recipes. Ladies are instructed how to reduce their weight without injury to health and without producing pallor and weakness. Nothing necessary to a complete toilet book of recipes and valuable advice and information has been overlooked in the compilation of this volume.

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent by mail to any address on receipt of price, by the publisher.

Address **GEORGE MUNRO, Munro's Publishing House,**

(P. O. Box 3751.)

17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.

# LIBRARY of AMERICAN AUTHORS.

TO BE ISSUED MARCH 28, 1891:

NO. 30,

## RUTH THE OUTCAST.

BY MARY E. BRYAN.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

NO.	PRICE.	NO.	PRICE.
29 HIS COUNTRY COUSIN. By Charlotte M. Stanley.....	25	15 A STRUGGLE FOR A HEART; OR, CRYSTABEL'S FATAL LOVE. By Laura Jean Libbey.....	25
28 EVE, THE FACTORY GIRL. By Lucy Randall Comfort....	25	14 ALL FOR LOVE OF A FAIR FACE; OR, A BROKEN BETROTHAL. By Laura Jean Libbey.....	25
27 HER SECOND CHOICE. By Charlotte M. Stanley.....	25	13 UNCLE NED'S WHITE CHILD. By Mrs. Mary E. Bryan.....	25
26 MANCH. By Mrs. Mary E. Bryan.	25	12 IDA CHALONER'S HEART; OR, THE HUSBAND'S TRIAL. By Lucy Randall Comfort.....	25
25 THE BELLE OF SARATOGA. By Lucy Randall Comfort...	25	11 JUNIE'S LOVE-TEST. By Laura Jean Libbey.....	25
24 HAZEL KIRKE. By Marie Walsh.....	25	10 LEONIE LOCKE; OR, THE ROMANCE OF A BEAUTIFUL NEW YORK WORKING-GIRL. By Laura Jean Libbey.....	25
23 LOVE AND JEALOUSY. By Lucy Randall Comfort.....	25	9 SAINTS AND SINNERS. By Marie Walsh.....	25
22 THE BRIDE OF MONTECRISTO. A Sequel to "The Count of Monte-Cristo".....	25	8 MADOLIN RIVERS. By Laura Jean Libbey.....	25
21 SWORN TO SILENCE: OR, ALINE RODNEY'S SECRET. By Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller....	25	7 LIZZIE ADRIANCE. By Margaret Lee.....	25
20 MURIEL; OR, BECAUSE OF HIS LOVE FOR HER. By Christine Carlton.....	25	6 MARRIAGE. By Margaret Lee	25
19 MARRIED FOR MONEY. By Lucy Randall Comfort.....	25	5 THE HEIRESS OF CAMERON HALL. By Laura Jean Libbey	25
18 LAUREL VANE; OR, THE GIRLS' CONSPIRACY. By Mrs. Alex. McVeigh Miller.....	25	4 DAISY BROOKS. By Laura Jean Libbey.....	25
17 VENDETTA; OR, THE SOUTHERN HEIRESS. By Lucy Randall Comfort.....	25	3 SHADOW AND SUNSHINE. By Adna H. Lightner.....	25
16 LITTLE ROSEBUD'S LOVERS; OR, A CRUEL REVENGE. By Laura Jean Libbey.....	25	2 THE ROCK OR THE RYE. (Comic). By T. C. DeLeon...	25
		1 MY OWN SIN. By Mrs. Mary E. Bryan.....	25

Others will follow at short intervals.

The above works are for sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent by mail on receipt of the price. Address

GEORGE MUNRO, Munro's Publishing House,  
(P. O. Box 3751.) 17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.



# Old Sleuth Library.

A Series of the Most Thrilling Detective Stories Ever Published!

ISSUED QUARTERLY.

- |                                       |          |  |     |
|---------------------------------------|----------|--|-----|
| 1 Old Sleuth, the Detective.....      | 10c      | 34 The Dutch Detective.....            | 10c |
| 2 The King of the Detectives....      | 10c      | 35 Old Puritan, the Old-Time Yan-      |     |
| 3 Old Sleuth's Triumph (1st half)     | 10c      | kee Detective (1st half).....          | 10c |
| 3 Old Sleuth's Triumph (2d half)      | 10c      | 35 Old Puritan, the Old-Time Yan-      |     |
| 4 Under a Million Disguises (in       |          | kee Detective (2d half).....           | 10c |
| two parts).....                       | each 10c | 36 Manfred's Quest; or, The Mys-       |     |
| 5 Night Scenes in New York.....       | 10c      | tery of a Trunk (1st half) ..          | 10c |
| 6 Old Electricity, the Lightning      |          | 36 Manfred's Quest; or, The Mys-       |     |
| Detective.....                        | 10c      | tery of a Trunk (2d half).....         | 10c |
| 7 The Shadow Detective (1st half)     | 10c      | 37 Tom Thumb; or, The Wonderful        |     |
| 7 The Shadow Detective (2d half)      | 10c      | Boy Detective (1st half).....          | 10c |
| 8 Red-Light Will, the River De-       |          | 37 Tom Thumb; or, The Wonderful        |     |
| etective (in two parts).....          | each 10c | Boy Detective (2d half).....           | 10c |
| 9 Iron Burgess, the Government        |          | 38 Old Ironsides Abroad (1st half).    | 10c |
| Detective (1st half).....             | 10c      | 38 Old Ironsides Abroad (2d half).     | 10c |
| 9 Iron Burgess, the Government        |          | 39 Little Black Tom; or, The Ad-       |     |
| Detective (2d half).....              | 10c      | ventures of a Mischievous              |     |
| 10 The Brigands of New York (1st      |          | Darky (1st half).....                  | 10c |
| half).....                            | 10c      | 39 Little Black Tom; or, The Ad-       |     |
| 10 The Brigands of New York (2d       |          | ventures of a Mischievous              |     |
| half).....                            | 10c      | Darky (2d half).....                   | 10c |
| 11 Tracked by a Ventriloquist....     | 10c      | 40 Old Ironsides Among the Cow-        |     |
| 12 The Twin Shadowers.....            | 10c      | boys (1st half).....                   | 10c |
| 13 The French Detective.....          | 10c      | 40 Old Ironsides Among the Cow-        |     |
| 14 Billy Wayne, the St. Louis De-     |          | boys (2d half).....                    | 10c |
| etective.....                         | 10c      | 41 Black Tom in Search of a Fa-        |     |
| 15 The New York Detective.....        | 10c      | ther; or, the Further Advent-          |     |
| 16 O'Neil McDarragh, the Detect-      |          | ures of a Mischievous Darky            |     |
| ive; or, The Strategy of a            |          | (1st half).....                        | 10c |
| Brave Man.....                        | 10c      | 41 Black Tom in Search of a Fa-        |     |
| 17 Old Sleuth in Harness Again... 10c |          | ther; or, the Further Advent-          |     |
| 18 The Lady Detective.....            | 10c      | ures of a Mischievous Darky            |     |
| 19 The Yankee Detective.....          | 10c      | (2d half).....                         | 10c |
| 20 The Fastest Boy in New York.. 10c  |          | 42 Bonanza Bardie; or, the Treas-      |     |
| 21 Black Raven, the Georgia De-       |          | ure of the Rockies (1st half).         | 10c |
| etective.....                         | 10c      | 42 Bonanza Bardie; or, the Treas-      |     |
| 22 Night-hawk, the Mounted De-        |          | ure of the Rockies (2d half).. 10c     |     |
| etective.....                         | 10c      | 43 Old Transform, the Secret Spe-      |     |
| 23 The Gypsy Detective.....           | 10c      | cial Detective (1st half)..... 10c     |     |
| 24 The Mysteries and Miseries of      |          | 43 Old Transform, the Secret Spe-      |     |
| New York.....                         | 10c      | cial Detective (2d half)..... 10c      |     |
| 25 Old Terrible.....                  | 10c      | 44 The King of the Shadowers (1st      |     |
| 26 The Smugglers of New York Bay 10c  |          | half).....                             | 10c |
| 27 Manfred, the Magic Trick De-       |          | 44 The King of the Shadowers (2d       |     |
| etective.....                         | 10c      | half).....                             | 10c |
| 28 Mura, the Western Lady De-         |          | 45 Gasparoni, the Italian Detect-      |     |
| etective.....                         | 10c      | ive; or, Hide-and-Seek in              |     |
| 29 Mons. Armand; or, The French       |          | New York.....                          | 10c |
| Detective in New York.....            | 10c      | 46 Old Sleuth's Luck.....              | 10c |
| 30 Lady Kate, the Dashing Female      |          | 47 The Irish Detective.....            | 10c |
| Detective (1st half).....             | 10c      | 48 Down in a Coal Mine.....            | 10c |
| 30 Lady Kate, the Dashing Female      |          | 49 Faithful Mike, the Irish Hero.. 10c |     |
| Detective (2d half).....              | 10c      | 50 Silver Tom the Detective; or,       |     |
| 31 Hamud, the Detective.....          | 10c      | Link by Link.....                      | 10c |
| 32 The Giant Detective in France      |          | 51 The Duke of New York.....           | 10c |
| (1st half).....                       | 10c      |  |     |
| 32 The Giant Detective in France      |          |  |     |
| (2d half).....                        | 10c      |  |     |
| 33 The American Detective in          |          |  |     |
| Russia.....                           | 10c      |  |     |

To be issued March 28th, 1891:

- 52 Jack Gameway; or, A Western Boy in New York..... 10c

A handsome catalogue containing complete and classified lists of all GEORGE MUNRO'S publications will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents.

The above books are for sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent to any address, postage prepaid, on receipt of 12 cents each. Address

GEORGE MUNRO, Munro's Publishing House,

(P. O. Box 3751.)

17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.



MUNRO'S PUBLICATIONS.

## MUNRO'S FRENCH SERIES

No. 1. An Elementary Grammar of the French Language.  
By ILLION CONSTELLANO.

Nos. 2 and 3. Practical Guides to the French Language.  
By LUCIEN OUDIN, A.M.

PRICE 25 CENTS EACH.

---

## HUNTERS' YARNS:

*A Collection of Wild and Amusing Adventures*

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## Kitchen Lessons for Young Housekeepers.

By ANNIE H. JEROME.

PRICE 10 CENTS.

---

## LETTER-WRITING MADE EASY.

PRICE 10 CENTS.

---

## Munro's Dialogues and Speakers.

No. 1. The Funny Fellow's Dialogues.

No. 2. The Clemence and Donkey Dialogues.

No. 3. Mrs. Smith's Boarders' Dialogues.

No. 4. Schoolboys' Comic Dialogues.

No. 1. Vot I Know 'Bout Gruel Societies Speaker.

No. 2. The John B. Go-off Comic Speaker.

No. 3. My Boy Vilhelm's Speaker.

PRICE 10 CENTS EACH.

---

The above works are for sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent by mail on receipt of the price. Address

GEORGE MUNRO, Munro's Publishing House.  
(P. O. Box 3751.) 17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.

MUNRO'S PUBLICATIONS.

---

## The Heiress of Cameron Hall.

By LAURA JEAN LIBBEY,

Author of "Miss Middleton's Lover," "A Forbidden Marriage," etc

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## MUNRO'S STAR RECITATIONS.

Compiled and Edited by Mrs. MARY E. BRYAN.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## THE Autobiography of a Barrel of Bourbon

By "OLD SLEUTH."

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## Kitchen Lessons for Young Housekeepers.

By ANNIE H. JEROME.

PRICE 10 CENTS.

---

## LETTER-WRITING MADE EASY.

PRICE 10 CENTS.

---

## Cutting-Out and Dressmaking.

From the French of Mlle. E. Grand'homme.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

The above works are for sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent by mail on receipt of the price. Address

GEORGE MUNRO, Munro's Publishing House,  
(P. O. Box 3751.) 17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.

MUNRO'S PUBLICATIONS.

# THE SHADOW DETECTIVE.

By "OLD SLEUTH."

PRICE 50 CENTS.

---

## Cutting-Out and Dressmaking.

From the French of Mlle. E. Grand'homme.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## THE ART OF HOUSEKEEPING.

By MRS. MARY STUART SMITH.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## THE NEW YORK FASHION BAZAR Model Letter-writer and Lovers' Oracle

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## THE NEW YORK Fashion Bazar Book of Etiquette.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## THE NEW YORK Fashion Bazar Book of the Toilet.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

The above works are for sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent by mail on receipt of the price. Address

GEORGE MUNRO, Munro's Publishing House,  
(P. O. Box 3751.) 17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.

MUNRO'S PUBLICATIONS.

---

## Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.

**By LEWIS CARROLL,**  
AUTHOR OF "THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS."

With Forty-two Beautiful Illustrations by John Tenniel.  
HANDSOMELY BOUND IN CLOTH. 12MO. PRICE 50 CENTS.

---

## Through the Looking-Glass & What Alice Found There

**By LEWIS CARROLL.**  
ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN TENNIEL.  
ELEGANTLY BOUND IN CLOTH. PRICE 50 CENTS.

---

## NEW TABERNACLE SERMONS.

BY THE  
Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage, D.D.  
HANDSOMELY BOUND IN CLOTH. 12MO. PRICE \$1.00.

---

Blood is Thicker than Water:  
A FEW DAYS AMONG  
OUR SOUTHERN BRETHREN.  
**By Henry M. Field, D.D.**  
PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## Juliet Corson's New Family Cook Book

**By MISS JULIET CORSON.**  
Handsomely Bound in Cloth. Price \$1.00.

---

The above works are for sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent by mail on receipt of the price. Address

GEORGE MUNRO, Munro's Publishing House,  
(P. O. Box 3751.) 17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.

MUNRO'S PUBLICATIONS.

## MUNRO'S STAR RECITATIONS.

Compiled and Edited by Mrs. MARY E. BRYAN.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## CONFESSIONS OF AN IMP.

By "OLD SLEUTH."

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## Blood is Thicker than Water:

A FEW DAYS AMONG

## OUR SOUTHERN BRETHREN.

By Henry M. Field, D.D.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

A PRACTICAL

## Guide to the Acquisition of the Spanish Language

By LUCIEN OUDIN, A.M.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

---

## MUNRO'S GERMAN SERIES.

A Method of Learning German on a New and Easy Plan.

By EDWARD CHAMIER.

TWO VOLUMES—PRICE 25 CENTS EACH.

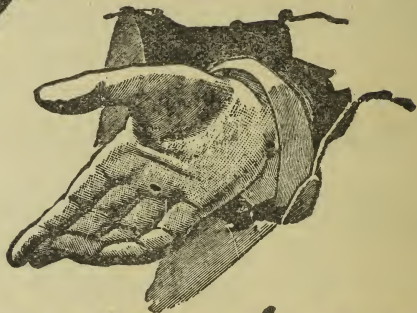
---

The above works are for sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent by mail on receipt of the price. Address

GEORGE MUNRO, Munro's Publishing House,  
(P. O. Box 3751.) 17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.



*Good*



*morning*

HAVE YOU  
USED  
**PEARS' SOAP?**

## The New York Fashion Bazar Book of the Toilet.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

This is a little book which we can recommend to every lady for the Preservation and Increase of Health and Beauty. It contains full directions for all the arts and mysteries of personal decoration, and for increasing the natural graces of form and expression. All the little affections of the skin, hair, eyes and body, that detract from appearance and happiness, are made the subjects of precise and excellent recipes. Ladies are instructed how to reduce their weight without injury to health and without producing pallor and weakness. Nothing necessary to a complete toilet book of recipes and valuable advice and information has been overlooked in the compilation of this volume.

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent by mail to any address, postage prepaid, on receipt of price, 25 cents, by the publisher. Address

GEORGE MUNRO, MUNRO'S PUBLISHING HOUSE,  
(P. O. Box 3751.) 17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.

---

## The New York Fashion Bazar Book of Etiquette.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

This book is a guide to good manners and the ways of fashionable society; a complete hand-book of behavior: containing all the polite observances of modern life; the Etiquette of engagements and marriages; the manners and training of children; the arts of conversation and polite letter-writing; invitations to dinners, evening parties and entertainments of all descriptions; table manners, etiquette of visits and public places; how to serve breakfasts, luncheons, dinners and teas; how to dress, travel, shop, and behave at hotels and watering-places. This book contains all that a lady and gentleman requires for correct behavior on all social occasions.

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent by mail to any address on receipt of price, 25 cents, postage prepaid, by the publisher. Address

GEORGE MUNRO, MUNRO'S PUBLISHING HOUSE,  
(P. O. Box 3751.) 17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.

---

THE NEW YORK FASHION BAZAR

## Model Letter-Writer and Lovers' Oracle.

PRICE 25 CENTS.

This book is a complete guide for both ladies and gentlemen in elegant and fashionable letter-writing: containing perfect examples of every form of correspondence, business letters, love letters, letters to relatives and friends, wedding and reception cards, invitations to entertainments, letters accepting and declining invitations, letters of introduction and recommendation, letters of condolence and duty, widows' and widowers' letters, love letters for all occasions, proposals of marriage, letters between betrothed lovers, letters of a young girl to her sweetheart, correspondence relating to household matters, letters accompanying gifts, etc. Every form of letter used in affairs of the world will be found in this little book. It contains simple and full directions for writing a good letter on all occasions. The latest forms used in the best society have been carefully followed. It is an excellent manual of reference for all forms of engraved cards and invitations.

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent by mail to any address, postage paid, on receipt of price, 25 cents, by the publisher. Address

GEORGE MUNRO, MUNRO'S PUBLISHING HOUSE,  
(P. O. Box 3751.) 17 to 27 Vandewater Street, New York.



**COLGATE & Co's**

**SOAPS**

**AND**

**PERFUMES**

**GOLD MEDAL PARIS  
1889.**